



**NAVAL  
POSTGRADUATE  
SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**EVALUATING COMMON HYPOTHESES FOR  
VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA**

by

Geoffrey A. Ellis

December 2016

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>
<p>Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instruction, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.</p>			
<b>1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)</b>	<b>2. REPORT DATE</b> December 2016	<b>3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED</b> Master's thesis	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> EVALUATING COMMON HYPOTHESES FOR VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL AMERICA		<b>5. FUNDING NUMBERS</b>	
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Geoffrey A. Ellis			
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> Naval Postgraduate School Monterey, CA 93943-5000		<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>9. SPONSORING /MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> N/A		<b>10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER</b>	
<b>11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b> The views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. IRB number <u>N/A</u> .			
<b>12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for public release. Distribution is unlimited.		<b>12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE</b>	
<b>13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)</b> <p>This thesis endeavors to bring analytical clarity to the assumptions that inform proposed policy solutions to the alarming rise in violence in Central America. The thesis evaluates three of the most common hypotheses for citizen insecurity in the region: the impact of structural economic problems like poverty and inequality; the efficacy of state criminological approaches; and the effectiveness of internal security institutions. To evaluate each hypothesis, the thesis uses a comparative case analysis of Nicaragua and El Salvador. In spite of dramatic divergence in violence outcomes, the two countries share many variables including geographical proximity, economic development challenges, a history of civil conflict, and democratic transition in the 1990s. Using homicide rates as the most reliable indicator of violence, the findings reveal that structural economic problems like poverty and inequality have only an imperfect correlation with citizen security. On the contrary, variables that correlate more closely with peaceful security outcomes include the effectiveness of security institutions—characterized by sophisticated plans, sound structures, and adequate resources—and rigorous criminological approaches as characterized by community involvement, efficient intelligence-gathering mechanisms, and recidivism reduction programs. The thesis's implications pertain not only to Central America but also to troubled regions throughout the world.</p>			
<b>14. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Nicaragua, El Salvador, Central America, violence, homicide, police, military, intelligence, citizen security, insecurity, poverty, inequality, criminology, rational choice theory, institutionalism, effectiveness, foreign assistance, CARSI.			<b>15. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 125
			<b>16. PRICE CODE</b>
<b>17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT</b> Unclassified	<b>18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE</b> Unclassified	<b>19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT</b> Unclassified	<b>20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> UU

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**EVALUATING COMMON HYPOTHESES FOR VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL  
AMERICA**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(WESTERN HEMISPHERE)**

from the

**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis endeavors to bring analytical clarity to the assumptions that inform proposed policy solutions to the alarming rise in violence in Central America. The thesis evaluates three of the most common hypotheses for citizen insecurity in the region: the impact of structural economic problems like poverty and inequality; the efficacy of state criminological approaches; and the effectiveness of internal security institutions. To evaluate each hypothesis, the thesis uses a comparative case analysis of Nicaragua and El Salvador. In spite of dramatic divergence in violence outcomes, the two countries share many variables including geographical proximity, economic development challenges, a history of civil conflict, and democratic transition in the 1990s. Using homicide rates as the most reliable indicator of violence, the findings reveal that structural economic problems like poverty and inequality have only an imperfect correlation with citizen security. On the contrary, variables that correlate more closely with peaceful security outcomes include the effectiveness of security institutions—characterized by sophisticated plans, sound structures, and adequate resources—and rigorous criminological approaches as characterized by community involvement, efficient intelligence-gathering mechanisms, and recidivism reduction programs. The thesis's implications pertain not only to Central America but also to troubled regions throughout the world.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CARSI	Central American Regional Security Initiative
CDC	Civil Defense Committees
CDS	Sandinista Defense Committees
CI	counterintelligence
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNSP	National Public Security Council
CPC	Citizen Power Councils
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DCSC	Division for Coexistence and Citizen Security
DIU	Special Investigative Unit
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FESPAD	Foundation for the Study and Application of Law
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GDP	gross domestic product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IGO	intergovernmental organization
ILEA	International Law Enforcement Academy
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs
INSCOM	US Army Intelligence and Security Command
LAPOP	Latin American Public Opinion Project
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PNC	Civilian National Police
PPP	purchasing power parity
PTS	Political Terror Scale
STRATFOR	Strategic Forecasting, Inc.
TAG	Transnational Anti-Gang Unit

UEA	Executive Anti-Narcotics Unit
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNO	National Opposition Union
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WOLA	Washington Office on Latin America

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Lauren, for her steadfast devotion, support, and intellectual engagement with my thesis project. This thesis is dedicated to her. From the beginning, she inspired me in countless ways and gave me her unconditional support during my time at the Naval Postgraduate School. I would also like to thank our three beautiful children: Anthony, Augustine, and Virginia.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my excellent advisors, Professors Esparza and Bruneau. Professor Esparza's wise counsel and guidance throughout the thesis project has been invaluable. He framed my thinking in ways that helped light the way. I also would like to thank Professor Bruneau for sparking my interest in the subject matter with a course on Central America. His enthusiasm for the subject and unwavering support inspired my research and made the project a joy to undertake from the beginning.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Of the 50 most violent cities in the world, 47 are found in Latin America, and of these, nine are found within Central America.<sup>1</sup> With by far the highest homicide rate of any city, the capital of El Salvador, San Salvador, emerges as the world's most dangerous place to live, with 188 homicides per 100,000 people each year.<sup>2</sup> In the same region, Nicaragua stands out as an international success story with a homicide rate of just eight per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> Central American states share many factors, including organized crime, corruption, geography as a transit point for drug traffickers, and development challenges, while also varying in terms of recent histories of civil war, authoritarian pasts, method of transition to democracy, economic policies, anti-crime policies, and levels of U.S. involvement. What accounts for the high levels of violence in some countries in Central America, and why are some countries in the region more disposed to violence than others? The overarching purpose of this thesis is to bring analytical clarity to the theoretical explanations for the problem of violence in Central America, which often inform policy prescriptions and U.S. foreign assistance approaches. Existing literature commonly ascribes equal weight to the different variables believed to cause or correlate with violence in Central America. This thesis sets out to rigorously evaluate common hypotheses. The purpose is to assess the strength of each tested hypotheses by using objective criteria to measure correlations with observed violence outcomes. Such analytical clarity should lead to the basis for better informed policy responses to the alarming phenomenon of skyrocketing violence in certain Central American republics.

This chapter begins with a review of the prevailing theoretical explanations for violence in Central America, from which emerge the three primary hypotheses that I will test: the structural economic hypothesis, the rational choice criminology hypothesis, and

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<sup>1</sup> “Daily Chart: Revisiting the World’s Most Violent Cities,” *Economist*, March 30, 2016. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/03/daily-chart-18>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> David Gagne, “InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up,” *InSight Crime*, January 14, 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/insight-crime-homicide-round-up-2015-latin-america-caribbean>.

the institutionalist hypothesis. I then outline my research design, which consists of a comparative case study model. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis's methodology.

## A. LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis examines the most common theoretical approaches that scholars, think tanks, nongovernmental organizations (NGO), intergovernmental organizations (IGO), and others use to explain the causes of violence in Central America. The literature consists of four basic theoretical approaches: structuralism, institutionalism, constructivism, and criminology theory. I outline the main arguments within each theoretical approach, which will lead into an examination of the most compelling hypotheses.

Structuralists contend factors external to individual agency constrain and shape the behavior of individuals toward fixed outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Structuralists fall into four categories of analysis pertinent to the problem of violence in society. The first group argues that poor economic conditions create structural conditions for violence to flourish. Some within this group highlight unemployment and the lack of social mobility as a key driver to delinquency, especially for young adult males.<sup>5</sup> Some attribute increasing violence in Central America specifically to worsening economic conditions and increasing inequality since democratic transitions.<sup>6</sup> Others point to the concept of social alienation or exclusion from citizenship—as a result of poverty and economic inequality—as the primary cause of violence.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Diego Esparza, Antonio Ugues Jr., and Paul Hernandez, *The History of Mexican Drug Policy*, Western Political Science Association, March 22–24, 2012 (Portland, OR), 4–5. <http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu/meet/2012/esparza1.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Richard M. McGahey, “Economic Conditions, Neighborhood Organization, and Urban Crime.” *Crime and Justice* 8 (1986): 231. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147429>.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline Moser and Ailsa Winton, “Violence in the Central American Region: Towards an Integrated Framework of Violence Reduction,” Working Paper (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002): 21. <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/1826.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt, “Fractured Cities, Second-Class Citizenship and Urban Violence,” in *Fractured Cities: Social Exclusion, Urban Violence and Contested Spaces in Latin America*, eds. Kees Koonings and Dirk Kruijt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 12, 21; Caroline Moser and Catherine McIlwaine, *Violence in a Post-Conflict Context: Urban Poor Perceptions from Guatemala* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001), 15.

The second group of structuralists uses a path dependency paradigm to account for structures they contend are conducive to high levels of violence in Central America. Diane E. Davis argues three structural processes converged to cause the current violence crisis in many Latin American countries. For Davis, “contested state formation, the institutionalization of an authoritarian political apparatus and its coercive arms, and industrialization-led urbanization” result in structures conducive to violence.<sup>8</sup> Charles T. Call emphasizes the role of war transitions and the need for demilitarization of internal security forces to establish structures that deter and reduce violent outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

The final two structural approaches center on material factors: geography and the prevalence of weapons. Central American republics share the common geographical attribute of acting as “bridge states” for narcotics traffickers from South America.<sup>10</sup> Many, like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), observe that this geographic position acts as a corrosive structural influence on all of the states, given that the massive sums of illicit money involved in the drug trade.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the relative geographic position of each state is similar enough to preclude geography to be one of the main causal factors behind the variance in levels of violence. As for the impact of weapons, some postulate that widespread availability of firearms within societies causes elevated violence rates. This line of argument contends that failing to enact effective gun-control policies has created structural conditions for violence in many countries.<sup>12</sup>

The institutional framework theorizes that the efficacy—or lack thereof—of institutions like the state, judiciary, police, and military primarily determines crime and violence outcomes. One group of scholars focuses on historical effects on institutions

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<sup>8</sup> Diane E. Davis, “The Political and Economic Origins of Violence and Insecurity in Contemporary Latin America,” in *Violent Democracies in Latin America*, ed. Enrique Desmond Arias and Daniel M. Goldstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>9</sup> Charles T. Call, “War Transitions and the New Civilian Security in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 35, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4146925>.

<sup>10</sup> Julie Marie Bunck and Michael Ross Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation: Drug Trafficking and the Law in Central America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 384.

<sup>11</sup> Theodore Leggett, “Crime and Development in Central America: Caught in the Crossfire,” UN Office on Drugs and Crime (May 2007): 25–26.  
[https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Central\\_America\\_Study\\_2007.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/pdf/research/Central_America_Study_2007.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 67–68.

unique to each country's past as the independent variable causing violent outcomes. Hall and Taylor define historical institutionalism as "explaining how institutions...structure a nation's response to new challenges" by examining the unique paths of each country's history and their effects on institutions.<sup>13</sup> With respect to Central America, some historical institutionalists contend that civil war periods had deleterious effects on key state institutions in manners unique to each country. Cruz contends that "violent entrepreneurs" from the civil war period in Northern Triangle states (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala) persist within state institutions and act as a corrosive influence, facilitating an atmosphere of lawlessness and of violence.<sup>14</sup> Fuentes argues that the civil war has diminished institutional capacities on a broad front by reducing vital economic and social investments.<sup>15</sup>

Some institutionalists emphasize the corrupting influence of wealthy narco-trafficking organizations on institutions like the police, military, legislatures, state bureaucracies, and judiciaries. Moises Naim notes a global trend since the Great Recession in which criminal traffickers have stepped up efforts to corrupt, manipulate, and infiltrate state institutions.<sup>16</sup> Julie Bunck and Michael Fowler observe that these criminal trafficking organizations in Central America use "bribes, bullets, and intimidation" to weaken and coerce institutions.<sup>17</sup> In a related vein, others hypothesize that Central American states suffer from inadequate funding of key state institutions, resulting in diminished state capacities to deter and prosecute violent actors.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, *Political Science and Three New Institutionalisms*, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung (MPIFG), May 9, 1996 (Köln, Germany: MPIFG Scientific Advisory Board, 1996), 9. [http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2782/pdf/dp96\\_6.pdf](http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2011/2782/pdf/dp96_6.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> José Miguel Cruz, "Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State," *Latin American Politics and Society* 53, no. 4 (2011): 25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41342343>.

<sup>15</sup> Juan Alberto Fuentes, "Violent Conflict and Development in Latin America: The Cases of Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala," *UNDP Human Development Reports* (2005): section III - III.1. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/violent-conflict-and-human-development-latin-america>.

<sup>16</sup> Moises Naim, "Mafia States: Organized Crime Takes Office," *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2012), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2012-04-20/mafia-states>.

<sup>17</sup> Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*.

<sup>18</sup> Jose Miguel Cruz, "Violence, Insecurity, and Elite Maneuvering," in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas*, eds. John Bailey and Lucía Dammert (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006).

Some scholars use a civil-military relations framework to analyze how effectively institutions create conditions for social cohesion and violence reduction in societies. Thomas Bruneau and Cristiana Matei's civil-military relations framework includes not only the military but also institutions that deal with public security like police and intelligence agencies.<sup>19</sup> Bruneau and Matei created a trinity for analyzing civil-military relations consisting of "democratic civilian control, effectiveness, and efficiency."<sup>20</sup> The effectiveness concept assumes that the military, police, and intelligence agencies—when functioning effectively—are institutions that enforce order and peaceful coexistence. To assess the effectiveness of these institutions, Matei proposes three indicators: plans, structures, and resources.<sup>21</sup>

The constructivist approach to explaining the causes of violence in societies emphasizes the role of culture, identity, and other social phenomenon. Some argue that destruction of social capital in certain Central American countries through civil war and conflict has caused elevated violence rates.<sup>22</sup> Others contend that violence stems from a subculture—often gang-related—of young men in Latin America characterized by a sense of *machismo* that strongly encourages violent behavioral responses to certain situations.<sup>23</sup> Another hypothesis centers on the social constructs that drive individuals toward gang membership and violence, namely the gap between constructed media images of the good life and poor individuals' experience of life on the streets.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Florina Cristiana Matei, "A New Conceptualization of Civil-Military Relations," in *The Routledge Handbook of Civil Military Relations*, eds. Thomas C. Bruneau and Florina Cristiana Matei (New York: Routledge, 2015), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas C. Bruneau, "Civil Military Relations in Latin America: The Hedgehog and the Fox Revisited," *Revista Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad* 19, no. 1–2 (2005): 122. <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?Location=GetTRDoc&doc=GetTRDoc&ADNumber=GetTRDoc&ADNumber=a485204.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Matei, "A New Conceptualization," 32.

<sup>22</sup> Juan Alberto Fuentes, "Violent conflict and human development in Latin America: The cases of Colombia, El Salvador and Guatemala," Human Development Report, UN Development Programme (2005): III.4. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/violent-conflict-and-human-development-latin-america>.

<sup>23</sup> Howard S. Erlanger, "Estrangement, Machismo, and Gang Violence," *Social Science Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1979): 235. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2503146>.

<sup>24</sup> John Hagerdorn, "Gang Violence in the Postindustrial Era," *Crime and Justice* 24 (1998): 365, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1147588>.

Criminology theory uses several distinct academic approaches to account for the causes of violence. Sociology, psychology, and rational choice theory constitute three of the most common criminological explanations. From a sociological perspective, some contend that crime and violence involve a process of communication transmitted through social interaction that imparts “not only the techniques of committing crime, but also the shaping of motives, drives, rationalizations, and attitudes.”<sup>25</sup> Others use a sociological approach but focus specifically on criminal subcultures, including the conditions that foment such subcultures and the behavioral patterns imbued by them.<sup>26</sup> Criminologists like Herbert Bloch observe that the “differential response” of individuals in similar social situations points to the role of individual psychology and choice.<sup>27</sup> A classic psychological approach considers the detrimental psychological effects of violence in childhood on both aggressor and victim.<sup>28</sup> Another psychological approach develops a theory of self-control imparted primarily through close monitoring of behavior throughout childhood, mainly by the family and the school; the absence of inculcated self-control leads to individuals who inappropriately judge the benefits of criminal behavior to outweigh the costs.<sup>29</sup> The final criminological approach, rational choice theory, assumes that individuals conduct a cost-benefit analysis when determining whether they will commit a crime; consequently, the state can “control crime by adjusting the certainty, severity, and celerity of the sanctions at its disposal” and thereby deter criminal actions.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Herbert A Bloch and Gilbert Geis, *Man, Crime, and Society* (New York: Random House, 1962), 113.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 128. The authors explain the theory of Albert K. Cohen.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>28</sup> N. A. Card, “Toward a Relationship Perspective on Aggression Among Schoolchildren: Integrating Social Cognitive and Interdependence Theories,” *Psychology of Violence* 1, no. 3 (2011): 188. <http://psycnet.apa.org/?fa=main.doiLanding&doi=10.1037/a0023711>.

<sup>29</sup> Michael R. Gottfredson and Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 119–20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13.

## B. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

One independent variable alone cannot account for the complex dependent variable of violence rates within a society, but the question is whether one or more independent variables might best explain violence in Central America. The three most pertinent explanations for elevated violence levels applied to Central America are structuralist economic explanations, institutionalist approaches, and rational choice criminology theory. These approaches constitute the most plausible theories that are also testable from a national security affairs perspective. Evaluating hypotheses that rely on theories like constructivism, psychological criminology theory, and sociological criminology theory in Central America would extend beyond the feasibility of this thesis; collecting and analyzing relevant data would require both technical training and in-country access beyond my purview.

### 1. Structural Economic Hypothesis

Structuralists who study Central America often criticize recent economic history in the region and, in particular, the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Nevertheless, most detractors fail to describe precise causal linkages between neoliberal reforms and violence; often, scholars use neoliberalism as a general structural problem and assume, without offering evidence, that these reforms have exacerbated violence rates. As such, assessing precise structural economic correlations or causes of violence rates would fill a key gap in the scholarship. Structural economic explanations fall into one of two hypotheses centering on the variables of poverty and inequality respectively.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: The first structural hypothesis correlates violence with poverty. If higher poverty rates result in more violence, countries with higher poverty rates should exhibit higher homicide rates. The presence of low homicide rates alongside high poverty rates would call this hypothesis into question.

**H<sub>2</sub>**: The second structural hypothesis correlates violence with economic inequality. For this hypothesis to be true for Central America, countries with more

economic inequality should exhibit higher homicide rates. On the other hand, an economically unequal country with low homicide rates would challenge this hypothesis.

## **2. Institutionalist Hypothesis**

Institutionalist perspectives often link elevated violence rates with the dysfunction of state institutions, particularly security institutions like military, police, and intelligence agencies. Some common problems associated with Central American institutions are corruption, the influence of narco-trafficking organizations, the effect of recent conflicts, and the role of foreign interventionism. The scholarship using this theoretical approach is rich, but some areas ripe for exploration remain from a historical institutionalist perspective, particularly with respect to the development of state institutions during civil war and democratic transition periods.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** If security institutions are underfunded, inadequately staffed, lacking appropriate mandates, or otherwise impaired, then institutionalists would expect to see higher homicide rates. The existence of low violence rates in a country with poor institutions would challenge this argument. Conversely, institutionalists contend that well-funded, functioning institutions cause violence rates to decrease. If a country with functioning institutions has high homicide rates, this hypothesis would be challenged.

## **3. Rational Choice Criminology Hypothesis**

Finally, rational choice criminology theory examines the effect of state laws and government policies on the outcome of violence rates, with the inference that individuals make choices to commit or refrain from violence based on the efficacy and enforcement of these laws and policies—particularly those pertaining to policing, prosecution, and rehabilitation.

**H<sub>4</sub>:** According to the rational choice criminology hypothesis, higher homicide rates should correlate with ineffective, inadequate, or counterproductive government approaches and policies. Contrarily, sound policies and laws would be associated with lower homicide rates. Challenging this hypothesis would be evidence of a country with

sound government approaches but high violence rates, or the evidence of a country with low violence rates and also unsound government approaches.

These three hypothetical explanations are not mutually exclusive but do merit exploration individually to determine what ways they are applicable to Central America. One hypothesis might emerge as causally more significant, or alternatively each might contribute to the problem in different but equally important ways. A third outcome could be that one or more factors plays an enabling role, such that policies designed to address that particular shortcoming would most effectively ameliorate the problem of violence in Central America.

### **C. RESEARCH DESIGN**

A comparative case study between El Salvador and Nicaragua offers the most useful mechanism to analyze the three hypothetical explanations for the causes of violence in Central America. The design fits in the category described by John Gerring as “the most-similar method” that “looks for a few cases that are as similar as possible in all respects except the outcome of interest, where they are expected to vary.”<sup>31</sup> Nicaragua and El Salvador share enough relevant attributes to enable what Alexander George and Andrew Bennett refer to as “theory testing” to “assess the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theories,” in this case structuralism, institutionalism, and rational choice criminology theory.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the contrast of Nicaragua and El Salvador aligns with George and Bennett’s description of “heuristic case studies” that use “‘deviant’ or ‘outlier’ cases” to “help uncover causal mechanisms” and “inductively identify new variables, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, and causal paths.”<sup>33</sup> El Salvador and Nicaragua are at opposite extremes of violence measured by homicide rates within Central America. In 2015, El Salvador’s homicide rate was the highest in the Western

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<sup>31</sup> John Gerring, *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 209–10.

<sup>32</sup> Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2004), 75.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Hemisphere, at 103 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>34</sup> To the contrary, as indicated previously, Nicaragua has Central America’s lowest homicide rate. As such, the approach also aligns with what Gerring calls the “extreme-case method” that “exalts the criterion of variation to the point of being the principal feature of research design” in the hopes of “elucidating the mechanism at work in a causal relationship.”<sup>35</sup> Contrasting Nicaragua and El Salvador thus offers a useful method of assessing the most plausible hypotheses outlined above.

Nicaragua and El Salvador share enough key attributes to enable focus to remain primarily on the independent variables at question. Both are geographically situated so as to be “bridge states” for narcotics traffickers from South America.<sup>36</sup> This shared feature negates the importance of geography as a structural cause and allows focus on other variables. Another key similarity is that both Nicaragua and El Salvador endured a violent period of civil unrest during the 1980s. This shared variable allows for a fruitful examination from a historical institutionalist perspective, specifically with respect to how state and security institutions developed during civil war periods. Structurally and economically, both rank in the bottom half of the 2013 Human Development Index, with El Salvador at 115 and Nicaragua at 132 out of 187.<sup>37</sup> The similar levels of relative economic deprivation allow for an analysis of two countries with similar structural challenges, while simultaneously not excluding the possibility of key structural differences.

The differences between El Salvador and Nicaragua are reflective of elements in Central America as a whole. One variable concerns the nature of state development and, specifically, the method of institutional development prior to the democratic transition. Nicaragua overthrew a repressive authoritarian regime and security apparatus before its civil war, whereas El Salvador’s state retained authoritarian and repressive institutions

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<sup>34</sup> Gagne, “InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up.”

<sup>35</sup> Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, 217.

<sup>36</sup> Bunck and Fowler, *Bribes, Bullets, and Intimidation*, 384.

<sup>37</sup> “Human Development Index (HDI),” UNDP Human Development Reports, last modified November 15, 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi-table>.

prior to its democratic transition in the war period. Another divergent feature between the two countries is the role of foreign influence in each state. The U.S. supported El Salvador's government and military with hundreds of millions of dollars and significant human capital during the 1980s, while the U.S. actively opposed the Sandinistas in power in Nicaragua.<sup>38</sup> Finally, on a structural note, the two countries have historically had disparate levels of social inequality. As of 2013, El Salvador's Gini coefficient was higher than Nicaragua's by about eight points, 48.3 to 40.5.<sup>39</sup> This divergence offers room to explore the structural economic correlation with the variance in violence rates.

#### **D. METHODOLOGY**

The question of how to measure violence is fundamental to this analysis. Levels of general criminality are difficult to measure in Latin America due to the existence of what Mark Ungar calls the “*cifra negra* (black figure)” that results in up to 80 percent of crimes going unreported in many states throughout the region.<sup>40</sup> The most reliable metric for measuring criminality and violence levels is the homicide rate, since these are most reliably reported and tracked not only by governments, but also by NGOs and international agencies.<sup>41</sup> The thesis accordingly relies on homicide rates as the main indicator of violence levels in each country.

The sources I use will vary depending on the hypothetical approach. For structural economic analysis, the most useful sources will be from various economic monitoring organizations and institutes, especially those that provide detailed rankings on various key macro- and microeconomic indicators. For the examination of historical institutional development, I will use primary documents—including declassified reports, government documents, news reports, memoirs, and more—as well as secondary scholarly sources written about the events. Other methods to evaluate institutional performance include

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<sup>38</sup> Booth et al., *Understanding Central America*, 347.

<sup>39</sup> “Income Gini coefficient,” United Nations Development Programme, last modified November 15, 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/income-gini-coefficient>.

<sup>40</sup> Mark Ungar, *Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 48–49.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 49–50.

regional polling organizations like the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) that give insight into attitudes and perceptions of institutions. For the examination of rational choice theory, I will rely on primary and secondary sources that detail government approach and policies, as well as statistics and other metrics that might reveal correlations between policies and violence rates.

## II. EVALUATING THE STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC HYPOTHESIS

This chapter evaluates the first of the three hypotheses I will examine in this thesis: the structural economic hypothesis. At the heart of the structural economic hypothesis is the argument that individuals in poorer and less equal societies commit a higher quantity of violent crime. In examining the reasons for violence in Central America, academics, think tanks, and organizations like the United Nations frequently correlate high levels of poverty and inequality with higher violent crime rates.<sup>42</sup> Some argue that poor economic conditions create structural conditions for violence to flourish. Booth et al. ascribe to neoliberalism the failures of equitable social distribution and argue that inequality has fueled class conflict and undermined state institutions.<sup>43</sup> The UNODC devotes a section of its report on Central America to the poverty and inequality hypothesis.<sup>44</sup> In a recent article about El Salvador, Strategic Forecasting, Inc. (STRATFOR) identifies poverty and structural economic problems as one of the factors behind El Salvador's rapidly escalating homicide rates.<sup>45</sup> The prevalence of these arguments—in many cases as an implicit assumption in the academic literature analyzing problems in Central America today—makes evaluating the structural economic hypothesis all the more important.

The question driving this chapter, then, is as follows: How do economic poverty and inequality correlate with violence rates in Central America? To offer the most rigorous assessment of the poverty and inequality variables, this chapter widens the scope of case studies to include the six main countries in the region: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section offers definitions and an explanation of violence metrics used in this

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<sup>42</sup> Leggett, “Crime and Development in Central America,” 26–29.

<sup>43</sup> John A. Booth, Christine J. Wade, and Thomas W. Walker, *Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015), 67.

<sup>44</sup> Leggett, “Crime and Development in Central America,” 26–29.

<sup>45</sup> “El Salvador: Bleak Prospects in the Face of Criminal Violence,” STRATFOR Global Intelligence, Feb 9, 2016, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/el-salvador-bleak-prospects-face-criminal-violence>.

chapter. In the second section, I use economic data and country rankings to evaluate the hypothesis that higher poverty correlates with elevated violence rates. The third section assesses the inequality hypothesis using a similar methodology. The final section consists of conclusions and observations.

The chapter's findings result in a nuanced assessment of the structural economic hypothesis's validity and have significant policy implications. Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala align with the predicted outcomes vis-à-vis most poverty and inequality indicators, while El Salvador and Nicaragua routinely diverge. The hypothesis's inapplicability in two important cases—Nicaragua and El Salvador—suggests that ameliorating poverty and inequality may not be the most effective or immediate solution to violence. The chapter's findings are significant because of the prevalence of structural economic hypotheses in the literature for both diagnosing problems and prescribing solutions for violence the region. Subsequent chapters will examine the validity of two of the most common additional explanations for violence in Central America—rational choice criminology and institutionalist hypotheses—pertaining to the cases of El Salvador and Nicaragua, a case selection validated in this chapter due to their consistent deviation from the structural economic hypothesis's predicted outcome.

## **A. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

### **1. Definitions**

Before testing the hypothesis, it is first necessary to establish how this chapter defines the hypothesis's two core concepts: poverty and inequality. Poverty can be defined in both relative and absolute terms. An absolute measure of poverty has been established by the World Bank, which uses \$1.90 per day as a threshold below which one is considered to live in poverty.<sup>46</sup> Relative or indirect measures of poverty include gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, unemployment, literacy, and education rates. Similarly, both absolute and relative measurements pertain to inequality. For inequality,

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<sup>46</sup> "Poverty & Equity Data," World Bank, accessed March 8, 2016, <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/home/>.

this chapter uses the Gini Index as the commonly accepted best absolute measurement. Indirect indicators of inequality include evaluations of the microeconomic climate's ability to foster social mobility. To this end, two reputable indices are the Index of Economic Freedom and the Ease of Doing Business Index. Other indirect indicators of inequality include the Human Opportunity Index, which measures access to basic public goods, and the Corruption Perceptions Index, which offers an indirect measure of how well institutions enable access to public goods.

## **2. Violence Metrics**

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the most reliable metric for measuring criminality and violence levels is the homicide rate, since these statistics are most reliably reported and tracked not only by governments, but also by NGOs and international agencies.<sup>47</sup> Figure 1 depicts the upward trend in homicide rates in the crime-plagued countries of the Northern Triangle, which includes Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras from 1990 to 2010.

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<sup>47</sup> Ungar, *Policing Democracy*, 49–50.

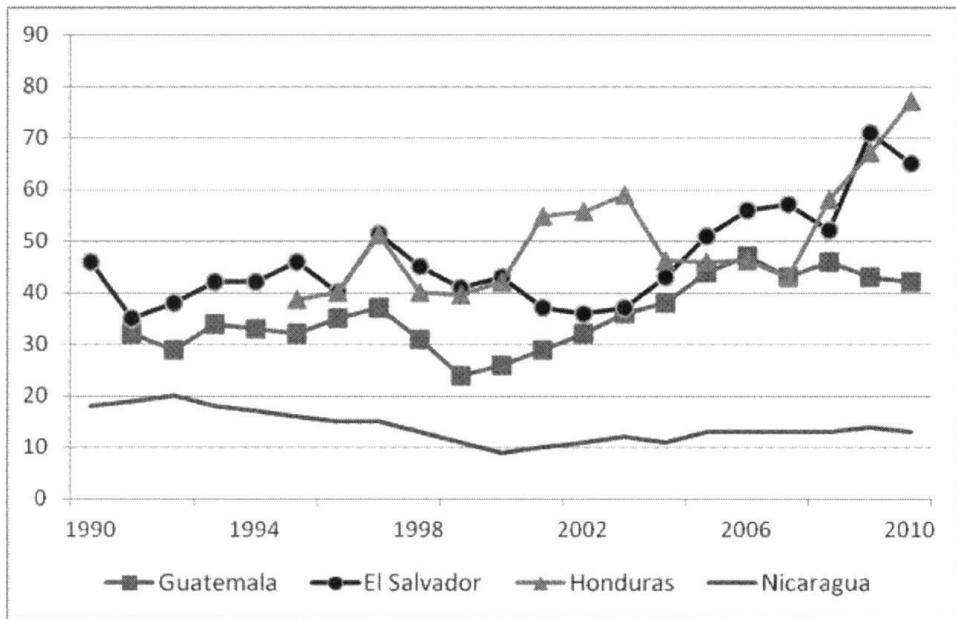


Figure 1. Homicide Rates in Central America, 1990–2010 (per 100,000 Inhabitants)<sup>48</sup>

Since 2010, El Salvador's rate has continued its upward trend, whereas that of Honduras and Guatemala has experienced a downward move. Figure 2 displays the current data for the six countries in Central America on which this inquiry focuses. As of 2015, El Salvador is projected to have the highest homicide rate in the region, at 92 per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>49</sup> Honduras and Guatemala come in second and third behind El Salvador, followed by Panama, Costa Rica, and finally Nicaragua with the lowest rate.

<sup>48</sup> Source: Cruz, “Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America,” 4.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Watts, “One Murder Every Hour: How El Salvador Became the Homicide Capital of the World,” *The Guardian*, August 22, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/22/el-salvador-worlds-most-homicidal-place>.

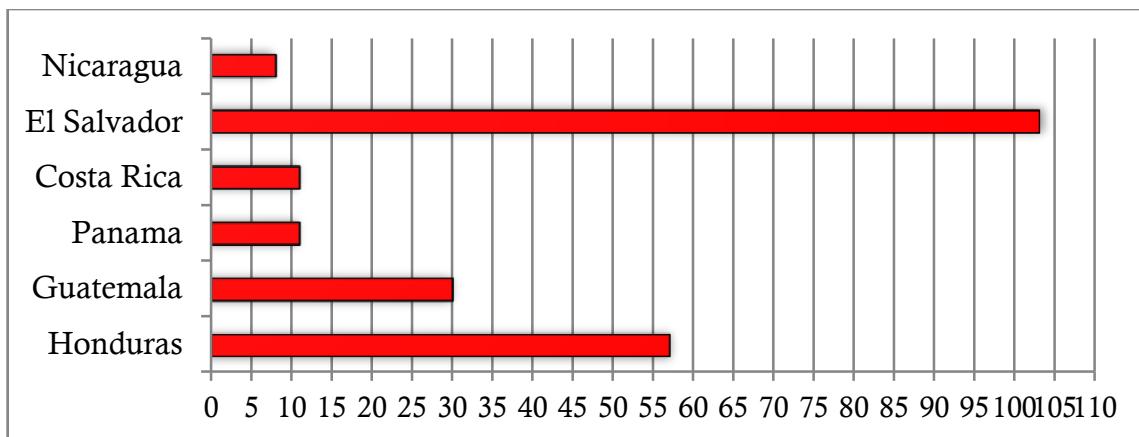


Figure 2. Homicide Rates in Central America, 2015 (per 100,000 Inhabitants)<sup>50</sup>

## B. ANALYSIS OF POVERTY AND VIOLENCE CORRELATIONS

This section assesses the hypothesis that correlates higher poverty rates with higher violent crime rates—or, for this chapter, homicide rates as the most reliable indicator of violence—using both absolute and relative, or indirect, measurements of poverty. The absolute measurement of poverty is the World Bank’s definition of poverty as a person living off of less than \$1.90 per day. For the relative measurements of poverty, this section uses GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP), unemployment, education, and literacy. Each of these indirect indicators reflects socio-economic factors that tend to keep individuals in poverty—or at least confound their economic advancement.

For each indicator, the structural economic hypothesis would predict that indicators of greater poverty should correlate with higher homicide rates. To achieve a perfect correlation in GDP per capita, for instance, all countries would have to be ranked in inverse order with their ranking by homicide rates, with the lowest homicide rate country having the highest GDP per capita, the next lowest homicide rate country having the second highest GDP per capita, and so on.

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<sup>50</sup> Adapted from Gagne, “InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up.”

## 1. Poverty in Absolute Terms: Less than \$1.90 per Day

As discussed above, the World Bank defines poverty as living with less than \$1.90 per day. As Figure 3 indicates, higher levels of poverty generally correlate with higher violence rates, with two exceptions. Costa Rica and Panama have two of the region's the lowest poverty rates, which correlate with their lower poverty levels. On the other hand, Honduras and Guatemala have two of the highest rates of poverty, which correlate with higher violent crime rates.

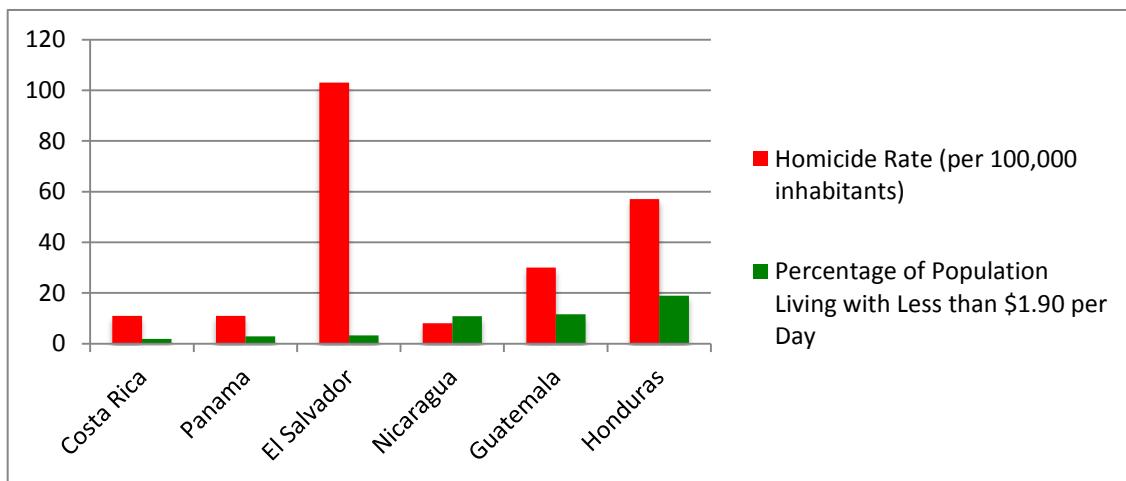


Figure 3. Poverty Rates Compared with Homicide Rates by Country in Central America (World Bank)<sup>51</sup>

The data in Figure 3 reveals two divergences from the outcome predicted by the poverty hypothesis: El Salvador and Nicaragua. El Salvador has one of the lowest poverty rates in Central America, a fact that should, under the poverty hypothesis, correlate with lower violent crime rates. In El Salvador, just over 3 percent of the population lives in poverty, but the country has the region's highest homicide rate. Conversely, Nicaragua's poverty rate, more than 10 percent of the population, is approximately equal to Guatemala's, but its homicide rate is the lowest in the region.<sup>52</sup> In

<sup>51</sup> Adapted from "Poverty & Equity: Regional Dashboard, Latin America & Caribbean," World Bank, accessed March 15, 2016. <http://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/region/LAC>; Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

<sup>52</sup> "Poverty & Equity Data."

absolute terms, the percentage of the population living in poverty is more than three times greater in Nicaragua than in El Salvador, yet the former has a dramatically lower level of violence. For the other countries, the results more or less align with the hypothesis's predicted outcome. Low-poverty Costa Rica and Panama have among the region's lowest homicide rates, while high-poverty Guatemala and Honduras have higher homicide rates.

## 2. GDP per Capita (PPP)

GDP per capita adjusted for PPP offers a way to measure levels of prosperity of countries against each other. According to the hypothesis that correlates poverty with elevated violence rates, lower GDP per capita should correlate with higher homicide rates. Figure 4 presents a comparison of homicide rates with GDP per capita (PPP).

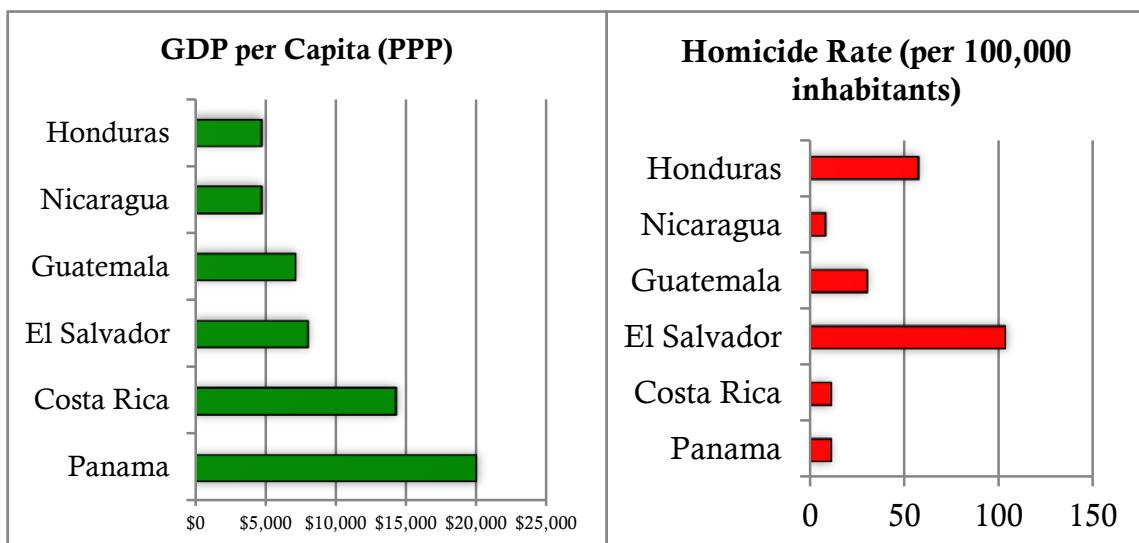


Figure 4. GDP per Capita (PPP) Compared with Homicide Rates by Country in Central America (World Bank)<sup>53</sup>

As Figure 4 shows, the correlation between this indirect indicator of poverty and homicide rates holds with the same two divergences: El Salvador and Nicaragua. The countries that align with the predicted outcome are the same as previously. Panama and

<sup>53</sup> GDP data adapted from "GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international \$)," World Bank, accessed February 20, 2016. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD>; homicide rate data adapted from Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

Costa Rica have the highest GDP per capita (PPP) and among the lowest homicide rates, whereas the converse is true for Guatemala and Honduras. On the other hand, the hypothesis would predict that Nicaragua should have the region's highest GDP per capita. Instead, Nicaragua, however, has the region's lowest GDP per capita and still one of the lowest homicide rates, while El Salvador has the third highest GDP per capita but by far the highest homicide rate. For these two cases, the correlation is thus significantly different from the expected outcome; indeed, the data shows the reverse of what would be expected.

### **3. Unemployment Rates**

If the structural economic argument were valid, higher rates of unemployment would correlate with higher violence rates. Scholars such as Richard McGahey argue that unemployment and the lack of social mobility are drivers to delinquency, especially for young adult males.<sup>54</sup> The data in Central America, however, reveals no such direct correlation. As Figure 5 indicates, the countries with the lowest unemployment rates for the past five years in Central America include Guatemala and Honduras, two of the three countries with the highest homicide rates. On the other end of the spectrum, Costa Rica—which has Central America's second lowest homicide rate—has had the highest unemployment rate for the past five years. It should be noted that the unemployment metric alone cannot account for the nuances involved in employment, particularly the quality of employment and levels of underemployment not reflected in this data. Nevertheless, unemployment data offers value as a standard and widely regarded measure of economic performance—one that reveals no clear correlation with violence rates.

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<sup>54</sup> McGahey, “Economic Conditions, Neighborhood Organization, and Urban Crime,” 231.

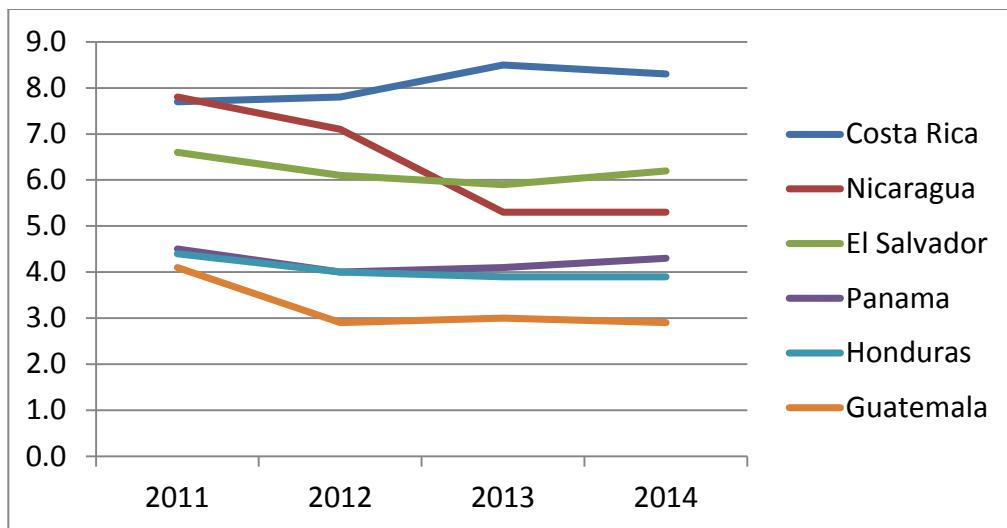


Figure 5. Unemployment Rate by Country in Central America (World Bank)<sup>55</sup>

#### 4. Education and Literacy Rates

According to the World Bank, “Education is one of the most powerful instruments for reducing poverty and inequality and lays a foundation for sustained economic growth.”<sup>56</sup> Advocates of the poverty hypothesis would argue that lack of education and literacy diminishes the potential for employment and social mobility in modern economies and thus acts as an indirect cause of poverty and higher crime rates. As Figure 6 indicates, Costa Rica and Panama have the region’s highest education and literacy rates, and also among the lowest homicide rates (see Figure 2 above). Costa Rica and Panama have significantly higher secondary education participation rates than the more violent countries of Guatemala and Honduras, whose lower education rates correlate with higher violence levels.

Once again, however, Nicaragua and El Salvador show divergences from the pattern. Per the data below, Nicaragua has the region’s second lowest secondary school participation rate, at 45%, and also the region’s lowest youth male literacy rate, at 85%. Nevertheless, Nicaragua’s homicide rates are the region’s lowest at 8 per 100,000 as of

<sup>55</sup> Adapted from “Unemployment, total (% of total labor force),” World Bank, accessed February 18, 2016. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS>.

<sup>56</sup> “Education,” World Bank, accessed March 2, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/education>.

2015, per Figure 2. El Salvador, on the other hand, has the region's third highest youth literacy and secondary education rate, behind Costa Rica and Panama, but remains the most violent country, with a homicide rate of 103 per 100,000 per Figure 2. Here again the data shows that indicators of poverty do not correlate with lower levels of violence for these two countries.

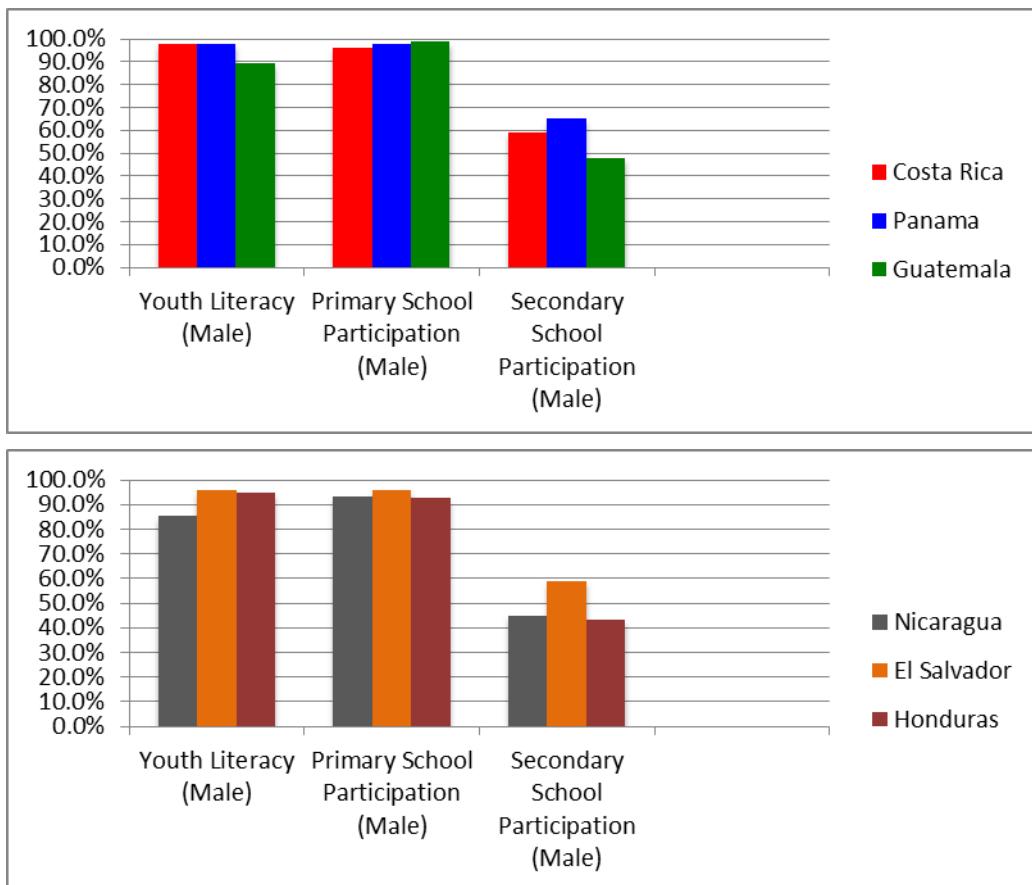


Figure 6. Education and Literacy in Central America<sup>57</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Adapted from "Information by Country and Programme," UNICEF, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry>.

## 5. Poverty and Violence: Conclusions and Observations

Table 1 summarizes the findings of the data used to evaluate the structural economic hypothesis pertaining to the variable of poverty. For four of the six countries analyzed, the hypothesis more or less correlates with the violence outcomes in each country. Low-violence countries like Costa Rica and Panama mostly fall in line with the hypothesis's predicted outcome. Indicators of poverty levels, GDP per capita, literacy, and school participation all place the two countries at the top of the region's ranking for wealth and prosperity. Likewise, Honduras and Guatemala—at the higher and middle range of regional violence levels, respectively—have poverty data that correlate with the hypothesis's predicted outcome. Honduras, with the region's second highest homicide rate, has high poverty levels, low GDP per capita, and one of the lowest secondary school participation rates. Guatemala, with the third highest homicide rate, has middling rankings pertaining to several poverty indicators, in line with what the hypothesis would predict.

Table 1. Summary of Findings: Poverty Indicators<sup>58</sup>

	People Living in Absolute Poverty	GDP per Capita (PPP)	Unemployment Levels	Youth Literacy Rates	Primary School Participation	Secondary School Participation	Homicide Rate per 100,000 people
El Salvador	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High	Medium	103
Honduras	High	Low	Low	High	High	Low	57
Guatemala	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	High	Low	30
Costa Rica	Low	High	High	High	High	Medium	11
Panama	Low	High	Low	High	High	Medium	11
Nicaragua	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	High	Low	8

Nevertheless, Nicaragua and El Salvador stand out as clear divergences from the hypothesis's expected outcome. Regionally, Nicaragua has above-average poverty levels, low GDP per capita, medium unemployment, and low secondary school participation,

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<sup>58</sup> Homicide rate data adapted from Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

and yet its homicide rate is the lowest in Central America. If the hypothesis were accurate, however, the poverty data suggests that Nicaragua should have one of the region's highest homicide rates. On the contrary, El Salvador has low poverty levels, medium GDP per capita, medium unemployment, and medium secondary school participation, but its homicide levels are by far the highest. In contrast to the data, the hypothesis predicts that El Salvador should have a low or moderate level of violence based on poverty indicators.

The divergence of Nicaragua and El Salvador not only validates the thesis's overarching case selection, it also raises a question with important potential policy implications: Why and how have Nicaragua and El Salvador so strongly deviated from the expected outcome? If other regional countries adhere to the hypothesis's expected outcome, the most likely explanation is that other variables outweigh the effect of poverty in these cases. The findings suggest that poverty is generally an important indicator of violence, but other variables—like those to be examined in subsequent chapters—can override the importance of poverty.

### **C. ANALYSIS OF INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE CORRELATIONS**

This section evaluates the second part of the structural economic hypothesis, which correlates higher economic inequality with higher levels of violent crime. To assess this argument, this section again uses both direct and indirect measurements of inequality. For the direct measurement of inequality, the Gini index offers the most suitable tool for contrasting the various countries in Central America. The indirect measurements of inequality consist of standard microeconomic indicators that evaluate how well or poorly state institutions provide basic public goods, govern efficiently, and allow for equality of opportunity for economic advancement. To derive these indirect indicators, I use data from the Human Opportunity Index, the Index of Economic Freedom, Ease of Doing Business rankings, and Corruption Perceptions Index.

## 1. Absolute Measurement of Inequality: Gini Index

Figure 7 depicts the Gini coefficient by country in Central America alongside a measure of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants; a higher Gini coefficient indicates greater levels of inequality.

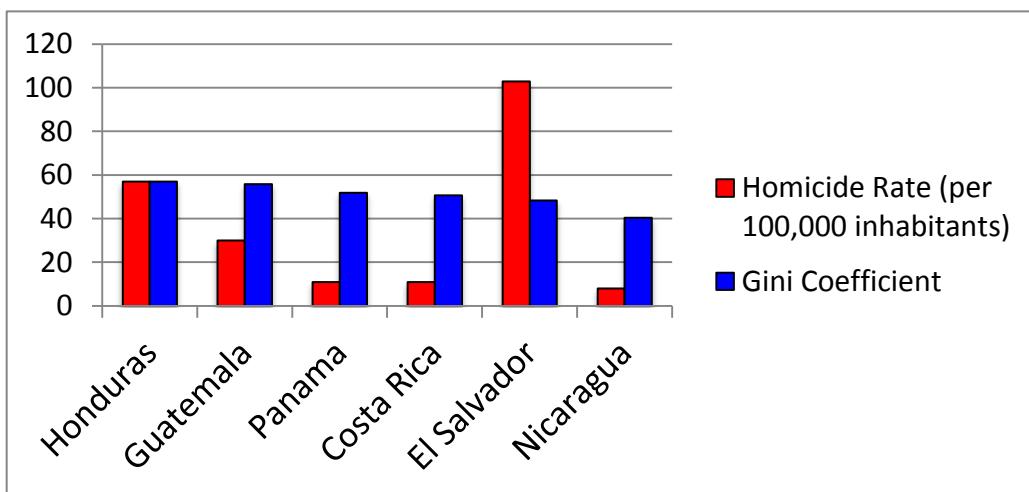


Figure 7. Homicide Rates and Gini Coefficients<sup>59</sup>

The findings generally support the hypothesis's contention that greater inequality should correlate with higher homicide rates, with the sole exception of El Salvador. Honduras has the highest Gini coefficient and also has the region's highest homicide rate excluding El Salvador. On the other end of the spectrum, Nicaragua has both the lowest Gini coefficient and the lowest homicide rate. Other countries fall into place with homicide rates ranked in the same order as Gini coefficient. Nevertheless, the exception of El Salvador demonstrates that the hypothesis does not achieve a perfect correlation. The divergence of El Salvador is particularly significant due to its flagrance: El Salvador is the second most equal country but still has, by far, the highest homicide rate. The case of El Salvador suggests that, as with poverty indicators above, other variables must be at work to cause a divergence from the hypothesis's predicted outcome. Another

<sup>59</sup> Adapted from "Income Gini Coefficient," UNDP Human Development Reports, UNDP, last modified November 15, 2013, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/income-gini-coefficient>; Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

complication for the hypothesis is that two countries with very small differences in Gini coefficients can have disproportionately large homicide rate discrepancies. For instance, the difference between Honduras' and Guatemala's Gini coefficients is only 1.1 or a difference of only 2 percent, while Honduras has almost double the homicide rate.

## 2. Inequality and Access to Public Goods: The Human Opportunity Index

The Human Opportunity Index was developed, according to Javier Reyes and W. Charles Sawyer, as “an attempt at quantifying equality of opportunity in Latin America,” specifically by measuring children’s access to sanitation, water, education, housing, electricity, and Internet.<sup>60</sup> Figure 8 shows each country’s results with the exception of Panama, for which no data is available.

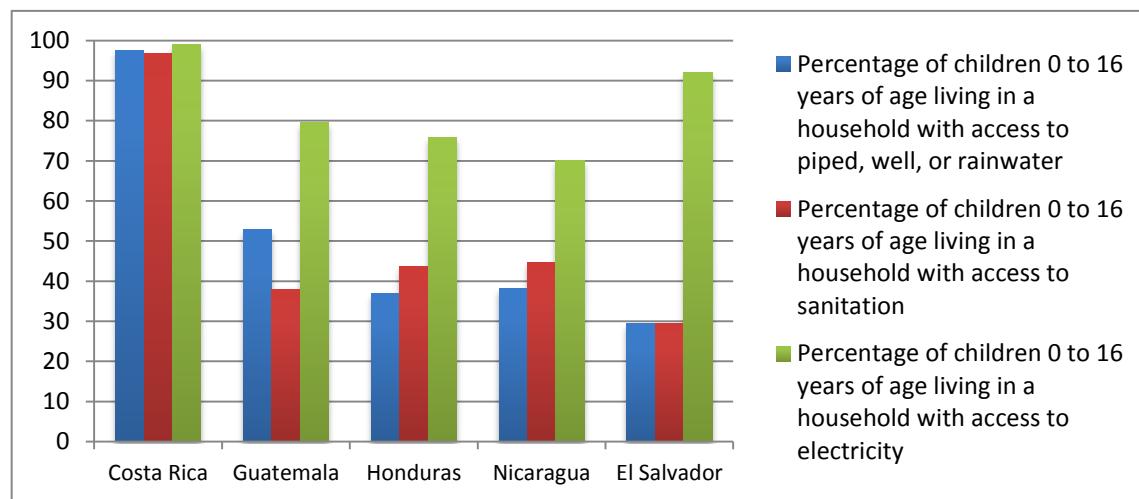


Figure 8. Human Opportunity Index in Central America (Circa 2011)<sup>61</sup>

Assuming the Human Opportunity Index accurately reflects conditions that lead to economic inequality, the inequality hypothesis would postulate that lower index scores should correlate with higher homicide rates. The results are mixed. Costa Rica, a low

<sup>60</sup> Javier A. Reyes and W. Charles Sawyer, *Latin American Economic Development* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 386.

<sup>61</sup> Adapted from “Visualize Inequality: Latin American & Caribbean: Coverage Maps,” World Bank, accessed Mar 21, 2016, [http://www1.worldbank.org/poverty/visualizeinequality/LAC/cov\\_maps.html](http://www1.worldbank.org/poverty/visualizeinequality/LAC/cov_maps.html).

crime country, has a clearly superior ranking in each of the three categories. Nevertheless, Nicaragua—with the region’s lowest homicide rate—should have among the highest percentages in each category, if the hypothesis were correct. Instead, Nicaragua ranks roughly equivalent to Honduras, a country with the second highest homicide rate, in access to these basic goods. Conversely, the country with the highest homicide rate, El Salvador, has the lowest percentages of children with access to clean water and basic sanitation, but the second highest percentage with access to electricity. Honduras and Guatemala, which have the region’s second and third highest homicide rates, have scores higher than El Salvador in two categories (access to sanitation and water), and lower in the category of access to electricity. The Human Opportunity Index thus reveals mixed results for the hypothesized correlation between inequality indicators and violence, with Nicaragua emerging as the most pronounced divergence from the expected outcome. The divergence implies the existence of other variables in Nicaragua that cause it to depart from general regional correlations between this indicator of inequality and violence.

### **3. Inequality and the Microeconomic Environment: Economic Freedom**

As Reyes and Sawyer contend, in a society that promotes economic egalitarianism, the regulation of business must be accomplished using means that do not impede equality of opportunity.<sup>62</sup> One indirect indicator that pertains to inequality is thus the assurance of a competitive free market, namely through institutions that support economic freedom, equality of opportunity, and the encouragement of economic growth. The Heritage Foundation ranks countries’ institutions based on four categories that evaluate how well they promote an environment conducive to citizens freely pursuing their economic wellbeing. The four categories are rule of law, limited government, regulatory efficiency, and open markets. Figure 9 displays the results of each country’s overall score within the ranking system.

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<sup>62</sup> Reyes and Sawyer, *Latin American Economic Development*, 396.

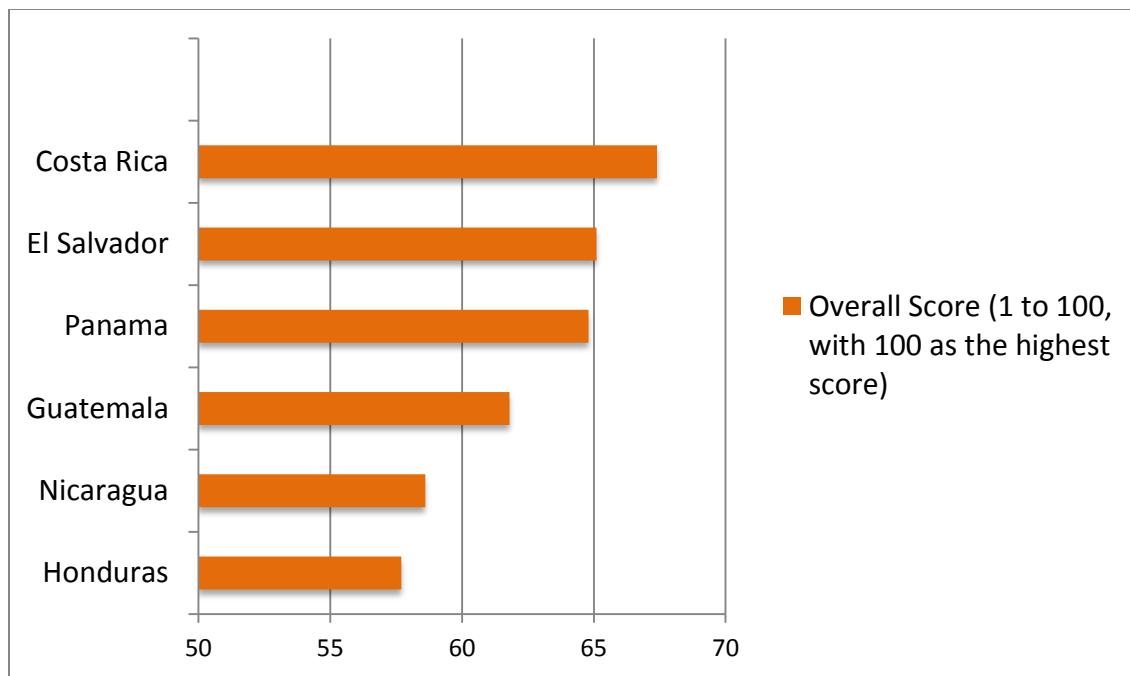


Figure 9. Index of Economic Freedom Rankings (Heritage Foundation)<sup>63</sup>

The findings show a general positive correlation between this indirect gauge of inequality and violence. Less violent Costa Rica and Panama score highest in the region, while more violent Guatemala and Honduras score near the bottom. Nevertheless, El Salvador and Nicaragua once again diverge from the hypothesis's predicted outcome. El Salvador has the second highest economic freedom ranking in Central America, but it is by far the region's most violent country as measured by homicide rates. On the other end of the spectrum, Nicaragua has the region's lowest homicide rate but the region's second lowest economic freedom ranking. The divergences of Nicaragua and El Salvador are reminiscent of the results of the poverty section above. As before, the data suggests that other variables—to be examined in subsequent chapters—might supersede the economic variables with respect to violence outcomes in these two cases.

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<sup>63</sup> Adapted from “2016 Index of Economic Freedom,” The Heritage Foundation, accessed March 21, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/index/>.

#### 4. Inequality and Microeconomic Climate: Ease of Doing Business

Another indirect indicator relevant to inequality measures how well a country's microeconomic climate affords equality of access to social mobility through entrepreneurship. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index measures how well "the regulatory environment is conducive to business operation."<sup>64</sup> In this index, countries with lower numerical rankings have better business environments, from 1 to 189. As Table 2 indicates, Costa Rica has the best business environment in Central America at a ranking of 58, and Nicaragua has the worst ranking at 125. El Salvador ranks near the regional mean at 86.

Table 2. Ease of Doing Business Ranking (1 to 189 with 1 as Highest), 2015<sup>65</sup>

<u>Country</u>	<u>Ranking</u>
Costa Rica	58
Panama	69
Guatemala	81
El Salvador	86
Honduras	115
Nicaragua	125

Costa Rica, Panama, Guatemala, and Honduras fall into rankings that parallel their position as ranked by homicide rates. Costa Rica and Panama, which are tied for the region's second lowest homicide rate, are ranked in the top two for best business environments. On the contrary, Honduras has the region's second highest homicide rate and the second worst business environment. Nicaragua starkly diverges from the

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<sup>64</sup> "Ease of Doing Business Index," World Bank, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.BUS.EASE.XQ>.

<sup>65</sup> Adapted from "Ease of Doing Business Index."

expected outcome, however, with the region's worst business environment but the lowest homicide rate. El Salvador has a regionally average business environment but the highest homicide rate. As with other indicators, this indirect indicator of inequality correlates with homicide rates with the important exclusions of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Another instance of divergence of these two countries adds to the likelihood that other non-economic variables are overriding the structural economic hypothesis's predicted correlation with violence levels.

## **5. Inequality and Corruption: Corruption Perceptions Index**

Corruption often results in an insidious cronyism that favors those with ties to government officials rather than creating a competitive microeconomic climate in which individuals have equal access to goods and social advancement. Levels of corruption can thus be an indirect indicator of inequality, since more corrupt societies tend to be more highly stratified in access to economic and public goods. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is one of the most common indices that ranks each country in the world, as its website states, "on a scale of 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean)."<sup>66</sup> Figure 10 shows the scores of each Central American country analyzed in this chapter.

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<sup>66</sup> "Table of Results: Corruption Perceptions Index 2015," Transparency International, accessed March 22, 2016, <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015#results-table>.

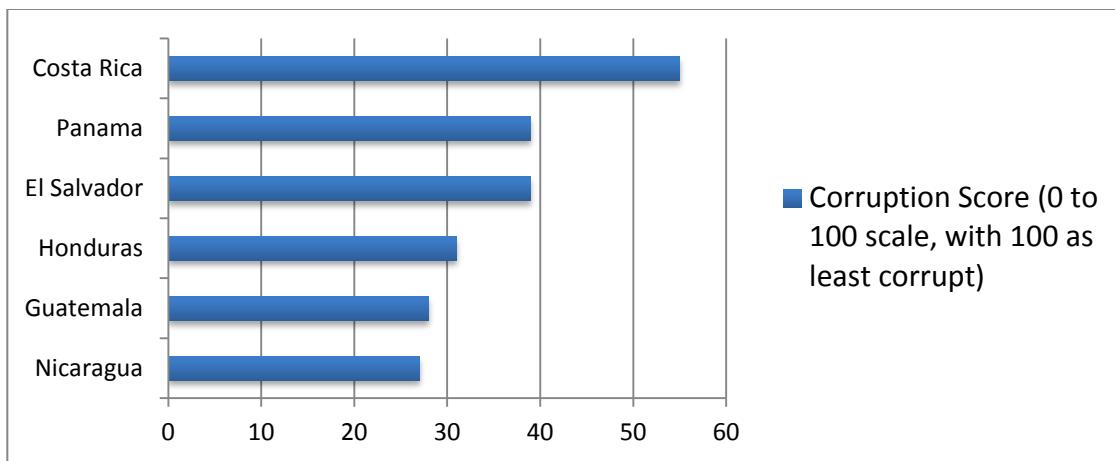


Figure 10. Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index Scores, 2015<sup>67</sup>

As Figure 10 indicates, El Salvador and Nicaragua once again stand out as the exceptions to the correlation between this indirect indicator of inequality and homicide rates. Costa Rica and Panama once again fall at the high end of the rankings, as hypothesis predicts given their low homicide rates, while Guatemala and Honduras rank near the bottom in accordance with the hypothesis. Nicaragua, however, is ranked as the most corrupt country despite the least violent country in Central America. Moreover, El Salvador ranks near the top—roughly equal to Panama—in spite of having the region’s highest homicide rate, a ranking that contradicts the hypothesis’s predicted outcome. Again the implication is that other variables must be at work in Nicaragua and El Salvador that transcend the impact of corruption as an indirect indicator of inequality.

## 6. Inequality and Violence: Conclusions and Observations

Table 3 below summarizes the results of the data in this section. As with the previous section’s poverty indicators, four of six Central American republics more or less align with the hypothesis’s predicted outcome, but the same two exceptions emerge: Nicaragua and El Salvador. Costa Rica and Panama emerge as countries with lower levels of inequality, an outcome that correlates with their low homicide rates. More violent Honduras and Guatemala score worse in every indicator of inequality, thus

<sup>67</sup> Adapted from “Table of Results.”

correlating with the hypothesis's predicted outcome. Both have high Gini coefficients, medium access to basic goods, and high levels of perceived corruption. Between the two, Honduras scores lower than Guatemala in economic freedom and business environment indicators, which correlates with its comparatively higher homicide rate.

Nicaragua and El Salvador clearly deviate from the hypothesis's predicted outcome. El Salvador has a low level of inequality, high economic freedom rankings, and medium rankings for business environment and perceived corruption levels. The only correlating indicator is the human opportunity index, in which El Salvador scores poorly. Given this data set, the hypothesis would predict El Salvador to have low or moderate levels of violence, in contrast to the actual extremely high levels of violence. Nicaragua deviates from the predicted outcome in the opposite manner. With the exception of the Gini Index, Nicaragua has poor rankings in each of the inequality indicators: limited access to basic goods, poor economic freedom rankings, a low-ranking business environment, and high levels of perceived corruption. Nevertheless, Nicaragua is the least violent Central American republic, a contradiction of the hypothesis's predicted outcome, which would expect Nicaragua to be among the most violent countries.

Table 3. Summary of Findings: Inequality Indicators and Rankings<sup>68</sup>

	Level of Economic Inequality	Human Opportunity (Access to Basic Goods)	Economic Freedom	Ease of Doing Business	Level of Perceived Corruption	Homicide Rate per 100,000 people
El Salvador	Low	Low	High	Medium	Medium	103
Honduras	High	Medium	Low	Low	High	57
Guatemala	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	30
Costa Rica	Medium	High	High	High	Low	11
Panama	Medium	N/A	High	High	Medium	11
Nicaragua	Low	Low	Low	Low	High	8

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<sup>68</sup> Homicide rate data adapted from Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

#### **D. CONCLUSIONS: ASSESSING THE STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC HYPOTHESIS**

This chapter evaluated the hypothesis that violence in Central America correlates with poverty and inequality. Tables 1 and 3 above summarize the findings for each indicator for both the poverty and inequality aspects of the hypothesis. The data broadly confirms the structural economic hypothesis's predicted correlations with violence outcomes in four of the six countries: Panama, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala. Indicators of poverty and inequality in these countries generally correlated with violence levels as measured by homicide rates. The section also revealed recurring deviations of El Salvador and Nicaragua. Highly violent El Salvador emerged as one of the wealthier and more equal Central American republics, while the data showed Nicaragua, the region's least violent country, to be one of the poorest and, with the exception of the Gini Index, one of the more challenged with respect to economic equality.

The findings do two important things. First, they corroborate the case selection of Nicaragua and El Salvador as the central cases for examination in subsequent chapters. Second, the findings confirm that, although structural economic variables of poverty and inequality correlate with violence outcomes in several regional countries, structural economic variables are not preeminent. These findings set the stage for an examination of what other variables might be superseding the economic variables in these two outlier cases. Moreover, the important deviations of Nicaragua and El Salvador should signal to policymakers that alleviating poverty and inequality—though laudable goals in their own right—might not be the most effective method of reducing violence rates. As the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador imply, policymakers should be ready to explore alternate causes beyond structural economic variables, a task to which the present inquiry turns in the next chapter.

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### III. EVALUATING THE RATIONAL CHOICE CRIMINOLOGY HYPOTHESIS

This section assesses the second of three hypotheses pertaining to the problem of violence in Central America: the rational choice criminology hypothesis. This hypothesis contends that internal security policies and approaches correlate with violence outcomes. According to the hypothesis, sophisticated and robust internal security policies and approaches reduce violence rates, whereas the absence of sound policies results in higher rates. This argument is based on the theory's contention that individuals choose to commit violent crimes with greater frequency in countries with states that fail to effectively deter, prosecute, or otherwise ascribe costs to the choice to commit such crimes. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter narrows the focus to a comparative case study of Nicaragua and El Salvador, with the aim of drawing out conclusions relevant to the region as a whole. To do so, I evaluate internal security policies and approaches in Nicaragua and El Salvador through the rational choice criminology paradigm and so test validity of the hypothesis. As shall become clear in this chapter, I find credible evidence to support the contention that effective internal security strategies and approaches correlate with violent crime outcomes in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

To this end, this chapter will proceed as follows. The first part of the chapter uses a historical analysis of security policy development during each country's recent history of civil conflict. This historical background offers insight into how divergent development paths have resulted in differing security sector approaches and policies. To examine how each state's security approaches developed, I review relevant scholarly literature, other pertinent secondary sources, and relevant primary sources like declassified embassy cables and intelligence reports.

The second part of the chapter establishes a framework for testing the rational choice criminology hypothesis, as well as for defining what constitutes effective security policies and approaches. The framework and definition draws from Ungar's *Policing Democracy: Overcoming Obstacles to Citizen Security in Latin America*, as well as Tim Prenzler's anthology *Policing and Security in Practice: Challenges and Achievements*.

The analysis centers on three indicators of internal security strategies that should, as the hypothesis and literature assert, deter violent outcomes: community involvement, intelligence gathering capabilities, and recidivism reduction programs.

This chapter concludes by summarizing the analysis and findings. Nicaragua's security policies and approaches—developed in a particular historical context—emerge as superior in each of the three categories, a fact that correlates with its dramatically lower violence rates and accords with the outcome predicted by the rational choice criminology hypothesis.

#### **A. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: ORIGINS OF INTERNAL SECURITY APPROACHES**

This section analyzes the security sector formation that took place during the turbulent periods of civil strife as the roots of current criminological approaches. The classical theory of the state articulated by Max Weber provides context for the analysis. Weber contends that the state must achieve “monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.”<sup>69</sup> As implied by the rational choice criminology hypothesis, how a state establishes—or fails to secure—a legitimate monopoly of the use of force influences how effectively a state can counter, deter, and prevent threats to internal security. In both cases, how security sector policies and approaches developed during the civil war periods has shaped the subsequent criminological approaches of the internal security forces. The analysis begins with El Salvador and then turns to Nicaragua.

Enrique Baloyra-Herp's characterization of Central America provides context for my historical analysis. Baloyra-Herp observes that Central America during much the 20th century was characterized by the existence of “reactionary coalitions” that governed through despotism and authoritarian measures.<sup>70</sup> The reactionary despotisms ruled with the aim of protecting an antiquated economic system based on export agriculture and a

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<sup>69</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, eds. Patrick H. O’Neil and Ronald Rogowski (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 40.

<sup>70</sup> Enrique Baloyra-Herp, “Reactionary Despotism in Central America,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15, no. 2 (November 1983): 317. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00000730>.

form of capitalism that benefited upper classes.<sup>71</sup> As Baloyra-Herp argued in 1983, “the contemporary crises of El Salvador and Nicaragua are related to the deterioration of this form of political domination.”<sup>72</sup> An ancillary theme in this section’s analysis is how the method and timing of displacing reactionary despotism influenced security sector development and approaches toward internal security.

## 1. El Salvador

During the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980s, the government functioned as what Fabrice LeHoucq characterizes as “a hybrid of democratic forms and authoritarian characteristics.”<sup>73</sup> As LeHoucq aptly articulates, “Although civilians now participated in the executive and legislative branches of government, it was the military in association with the U.S. Embassy that made key decisions.”<sup>74</sup> The U.S. government’s involvement centered on the goal of defeating the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN). El Salvador was in the throes of an active insurgency financed and supplied by Soviet bloc states. According to a declassified U.S. State Department cable from San Salvador in 1982, the FMLN was receiving covert assistance from the Cubans, Soviets, Vietnamese, North Koreans and Nicaraguans.<sup>75</sup> Assistance primarily took the form of weapons and supplies delivered through various air, sea, and land routes.<sup>76</sup> Guerillas in 1982 numbered approximately 10,000, with a total of 50,000 sympathizers and supporters.<sup>77</sup> The guerillas were not fighting a clean war. They not only conducted attacks against military targets, but they also excelled at “interdicting highways, bombing

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<sup>71</sup> Baloyra-Herp, “Reactionary Despotism,” 295.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Fabrice LeHoucq, *The Politics of Modern Central America: Civil War, Democratization, and Underdevelopment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 82.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> American Embassy in San Salvador, *El Salvador Military Assessment*, United States Department of State cable, August 4, 1982, <https://foia.state.gov/search/results.aspx?searchText=el+salvador&beginDate=19791101&endDate=19891101&publishedBeginDate=&publishedEndDate=&caseNumber=>.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

buses, and attacks on the electrical system.”<sup>78</sup> Academics who accuse the U.S. of unilateral interference and aggression in El Salvador ignore the context: communist states were actively supporting the FMLN, and many non-communists were struggling to defend their interests against radical guerillas.

El Salvador has a history of close relations with the United States, which has served as its mainstay of foreign assistance, development aid, and political support for decades. The U.S. government initiated the Alliance for Progress in the 1960s, and from 1962 to 1972 the U.S. spent hundreds of millions of dollars to support development, including the building of schools, the construction of ports, and other infrastructure projects in the Central America.<sup>79</sup> U.S. aid to El Salvador grew exponentially in the 1980s to support the government’s counterinsurgency against the FMLN. El Salvador received more than double the amount of foreign assistance between than any other Central American state between 1981 and 1992, for a total of \$273 million for the military and \$860 million in general economic aid.<sup>80</sup>

Nevertheless, in the context of fighting a well-organized insurgency against the FMLN, the El Salvadoran government—with the assistance of the United States—overlooked the development and implementation of sound criminological approaches. Many U.S. leaders felt they had no choice but to ignore grave violations on the part of El Salvador’s security forces, even when U.S. citizens were murdered. Two incidents highlight this reality. In 1980, four U.S. nuns were assassinated; in 1981, El Salvadoran officials directed, as Jack Spence notes, “the assassination of two U.S. citizens” and “the head of the Salvadoran agrarian reform agency.”<sup>81</sup> Rather than demand an investigation of these crimes, or even stipulate conditions on further military assistance, senior military and civilian leaders in the U.S. government advocated for the dismissal of the cases and

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<sup>78</sup> American Embassy in San Salvador, “El Salvador Military Assessment.”

<sup>79</sup> Booth et al., *Understanding Central America*, 28.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>81</sup> Jack Spence, “War and Peace in Central America: Comparing Transitions Toward Democracy and Social Equity in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua,” *Hemisphere Initiatives* (2004): 47. <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/hemisphereinitiatives/warpeace.pdf>.

increased foreign military assistance.<sup>82</sup> U.S. government position, as Spence contends, “was always compromised by its desire to avoid FMLN advances.”<sup>83</sup>

Members of El Salvador’s military understood the vulnerability of the United States and exploited its unconditional assistance. As Spence points out, “They [El Salvador’s military] knew the U.S. needed them” and used this dependence to ensure their “impunity from the law.”<sup>84</sup> The United States unwittingly helped foment impunity problems in the security forces in El Salvador. Rather than demand moral probity and adherence to the rule of law on the part of El Salvador’s government and military, the U.S. instructed security forces in methods of torture, harassment, intimidation, and repression. The Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Oversight released a fact sheet in 1992 admitting that U.S. training manuals for El Salvador’s security forces contained language inconsistent with U.S. policies against torture.<sup>85</sup> The following directive in the training manuals illustrates the point: “The CI agent could cause the arrest of the employee’s parents, imprison the employee or give him a beating as part of the placement plan of said employee in the guerrilla organization.”<sup>86</sup> Human rights abuses in El Salvador during the 1980s were frequent and well documented.

El Salvador’s security forces, by using any and all means necessary to defeat the threat posed by the FMLN, neglected the establishment of sound criminological approaches, which contrasts with Nicaragua’s experience in the 1980s, as shall become evident in the subsequent section. El Salvador’s police and military in the 1980s were totally engaged in a counterinsurgency against the FMLN that often failed to respect basic human rights, the building of relations with communities, and the development of sustainable policing practices. As a result of these particular sets of internal security habits, the UN-sponsored Peace Accords of 1992 prioritized reform of the security

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<sup>82</sup> Spence, “War and Peace in Central America,” 47.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense/Public Affairs Office, *Fact Sheet Concerning Training Manuals Containing Materials Inconsistent With U.S. Policy*, George Washington University, National Security Archive, 1992, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/archive/news/dodmans.htm#memo>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

institutions.<sup>87</sup> The nature and scope of the reforms shall be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter, but here it suffices to mention that the accords' focus on purification resulted from general dissatisfaction with repressive and unsustainable internal security approaches. Moreover, the accords sought to undertake a wholesale reinvention of internal security approaches through institutional purification rather than a positive vision of criminological and policing practices that had developed organically, for instance, in Nicaragua. As an example, per specific demands of the FMLN, the head of El Salvador's newly created Civilian National Police (PNC) could have no ties to the previous security apparatus.<sup>88</sup> The first director of the PNC, a businessman, had no prior police experience and consequently, had no experience on which to rely for the development of a security strategy.<sup>89</sup>

After the Peace Accords, the police and military, though reformed, lacked an institutional history of sound criminological approaches, in contrast to its counterparts in Nicaragua. The explosion of gang violence began while the consolidation of El Salvador's internal security approaches was still underway. El Salvador's spastic and inconsistent policy responses—*Mano Dura* (firm hand), *Super Mano Dura* (extremely firm hand), and the feckless *Mano Extendida* (extended hand)—reflect the newly reformed security sector's inability to draw from previous sound criminological approaches and the institutional architecture required to support them. On the contrary, Nicaragua, to which I turn now, had sound internal security approaches in place for over a decade prior to democratization and the onslaught of post-war security challenges.

## 2. Nicaragua

After overthrowing the repressive Anastasio Somoza regime in 1979, Nicaragua established a security model capable of withstanding the democratic transition without the need for drastic purges or radical doctrinal shifts. The consolidation of Nicaragua's

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<sup>87</sup> United Nations, *Chapultepec Peace Agreement*, January 30, 1992, [http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SV\\_920116\\_ChapultepecAgreement.pdf](http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/SV_920116_ChapultepecAgreement.pdf).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> "Aid to El Salvador: Slow Progress in Developing a National Civilian Police," U.S. Government Accountability Office (September 1992): 4. <http://archive.gao.gov/d35t11/147695.pdf>.

security establishment began in the years following the 1979 Sandinista revolution. What made Nicaragua so ripe for revolutionary activity—one supported by an unusually broad coalition including Marxists, business elites, and Catholic clergy<sup>90</sup>—was the repressive and exploitative nature of Somoza’s reactionary despotism. Somoza, according to Beverly Carl, “used his position to make his family the wealthiest in Central America,” controlling up to 40 percent of the economy, monopolizing the fishing industry, and owning 20 percent of all arable land.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile much of the population lived on meager rations and lacked basic sanitation, running water, and income.<sup>92</sup> In his memoirs, former U.S. Ambassador Frank McNeil relates how “it was the popular, across-the-board nature of the uprising that brought Somoza down.”<sup>93</sup> Even Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo of Managua publicly criticized Somoza following Somoza’s corrupt misappropriation of disaster relief after the earthquake of 1972.<sup>94</sup> The Sandinista transition away from a reactionary despotism marked a divergence from the path taken by the Northern Triangle states like El Salvador, which through the 1980s continued operating under varying degrees of reactionary authoritarianism.

Cuban involvement in Nicaragua began as early as 1959, when future Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) founder Carlos Fonseca traveled to Cuba and collaborated with Che Guevara, who initially sent Fonseca to Honduras for a brief but unsuccessful guerilla warfare campaign.<sup>95</sup> In Somoza, Castro recognized a vulnerable U.S. ally and envisioned the FSLN as the vehicle for his removal, an outcome that became more urgent for Castro following the Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA) 1954 coup in Guatemala and the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961.<sup>96</sup> Cuba actively supported the

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<sup>90</sup> Beverly May Carl, “How Marxist Is Nicaragua? A Look at the Laws,” *Crime and Social Justice*, no. 21/22. Social Justice/Global Options (1984): 117, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766233>.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Frank McNeil, *War and Peace in Central America: Reality and Illusion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1988), 109.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Gary Prevost, “Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship?,” *Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (1990): 121, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633815>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

FSLN by providing training, materiel, and financing, including supporting incursions from Honduras into Nicaragua, as well as facilitating high-level prisoner exchanges; as Fonseca admitted in a 1970 interview, the FSLN decisively owed its continued existence to Cuba.<sup>97</sup> The Cuban presence was extensive, according to a declassified CIA report from 1982:

The total Cuban contingent is approximately 6,000. They are employed in a variety of areas: 500-medical; 2,100 primary teachers; 300–600 government agencies; 100 secondary teachers; 750 construction/fishing; in addition to the 1,750 military/security advisors.<sup>98</sup>

The break with Somoza's structure of state security created an opportunity for new security structures in Nicaragua. A declassified U.S. Army Intelligence Survey of 1984, produced by the Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), contains a meticulous overview of how the security and defense establishment was formed in the years after the revolution. The most important aspect of the security regime after the 1979 revolution was the creation of the *Comités de Defensa Sandinista* (CDS) (Sandinista defense committees). The CDS originated from the *Comités de Defensa Civil* (CDC) (Civil defense committees) established by the FSLN during the revolution in 1978. The CDS combined social services with public security. The CDS drew on Cuba's model of local defense committees for "defending the revolution from ideological and political enemies, but also as a way of organizing the communities."<sup>99</sup> Membership in the CDS was diffuse and widespread. By 1986, membership in the CDS included 500,000 out of a total population of 3.5 million.<sup>100</sup> The CDS were responsible for planning for catastrophes in the conflict, including securing food inventories, maintaining health care

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<sup>97</sup> Prevost, "Cuba and Nicaragua: A Special Relationship," 121–126.

<sup>98</sup> "Nicaraguan Military Buildup," Directorate of Intelligence, United States Central Intelligence Agency, March 8, 1982, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679049604?accountid=12702>.

<sup>99</sup> Orlando J. Perez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies: Transforming the Role of the Military in Central America* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2015), 75.

<sup>100</sup> Kate Stout and Richard Dello Buono, "Nicaragua's Emerging Model of Popular Justice," *Humanity and Society* 10, no. 2 (May 1986): 210, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1309370859?accountid=12702>.

supplies and clinics, securing clean water supply, and caring for the wounded.<sup>101</sup> The organization became a focal point for the delivery of public goods, including “food, medicine, and other essentials in support of the massive relief effort needed to begin rebuilding the country.”<sup>102</sup> At the same time, the CDS initially served as a means to identify and neutralize counterrevolutionaries.<sup>103</sup> The FSLN created an echelon of “revolutionary guards” within the CDS specifically responsible for reporting on individuals to higher authorities.<sup>104</sup> A U.S. Army intelligence report details, however, that in spite of initial fears the CDS actually operated with few reported cases of totalitarian abuse.<sup>105</sup>

The Nicaraguan model of grassroots security has acted as a bulwark against the adoption of *mano dura* strategies that have characterized Northern Triangle states.<sup>106</sup> The FSLN-dominated CDS were used as a means of promoting local participation in the creation of a new social order. The CDS assumed a uniquely broad range of state responsibilities, including ensuring citizen security, providing for social welfare, enabling political participation, and delivering public goods.<sup>107</sup> The CDS served as a cornerstone of citizen security in the aftermath of the revolution. Local committees not only serve as conduits of reporting criminal behavior, but they also serve as crime prevention units active, as José Miguel Cruz observes, “in the development of local safety strategies.”<sup>108</sup> The chief of the PNC in 2014, Aminta Granera, attributed Nicaraguan internal security

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<sup>101</sup> Ericka Romero Gertsch, “De los CDS a los CPC,” *La Prensa*, 16 May 2010, <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2010/05/16/politica/24768-de-los-cds-a-los-cpc>.

<sup>102</sup> Army Intelligence Survey: Nicaragua, United States Army Intelligence and Threat Analysis Center, Vol. 3 (1984): 1–23, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679048599?accountid=12702>.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 1–24.

<sup>106</sup> José Miguel Cruz, “Organized Civil Society and Gangs: Alternative Responses by Central American Organizations,” in *Street Gangs in Central America* (San Salvador: UCA Publishers, 2007), 144.

<sup>107</sup> Stout and Dello Buono, “Nicaragua’s Emerging Model of Popular Justice,” 210.

<sup>108</sup> Cruz, “Organized Civil Society and Gangs,” 144.

successes to a combination of measures that are “preventivo, comunitario y proactivo,” or preventative, community-based, and proactive.<sup>109</sup>

Also key to the high functional capacity of Nicaragua’s security sector has been the legacy its professional and well-trained police force, which is one of the oldest continuous civilian police forces in the region.<sup>110</sup> After the 1979 revolution, the Sandinistas invited the Panamanian National Guard in to train its newly created PNC.<sup>111</sup> Several hundred Nicaraguan police officers also attended police academies in Panama during the years after the revolution.<sup>112</sup> The Army intelligence report details how the Nicaraguans soon created a sophisticated police academy that “includes an 8-month course emphasizing physical fitness, criminology, sociology, law, and political indoctrination” with “advanced training” for “specialized administrative positions such as prosecutors or police chiefs.”<sup>113</sup>

In summary, the removal of Somoza constituted an earlier break with reactionary despotism, and the new Nicaraguan government seized the opportunity to create effective internal security institutions. Though initially designed to solidify FSLN control, the security institutions were capable of adapting and transitioning to democracy without requiring the kinds of fundamental reforms seen in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan regime had established a monopoly of the legitimate use of force over territory more capably than did El Salvador during its civil war.

## **B. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SECURITY STRATEGIES AND INSTITUTIONS**

According to the rational choice criminology hypothesis, effective security strategies correlate with reduced violence rates by making violent crime a less appealing

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<sup>109</sup> “PNUD destaca baja tasa de homicidios y de robos en Nicaragua” (UNDP highlights low rate of homicide and robbery in Nicaragua), *La Prensa*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.laprensa.hn/mundo/americalatina/713329-98/pnud-destaca-baja-tasa-de-homicidios-y-de-robos-en-nicaragua>.

<sup>110</sup> Perez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies*, 74.

<sup>111</sup> *Army Intelligence Survey: Nicaragua*, 1–24.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

a choice for the individual. Three elements emerge in security and policing literature as essential to sound internal security and criminological approaches: community involvement, intelligence gathering capabilities, and recidivism reduction programs. Each is elaborated below.

Community involvement refers to the concept of police legitimacy as aptly described by Sargeant et al. According to the authors, the first characteristic of police legitimacy is a perception that causes “people [to] feel that they ought to defer to their decisions and rules, cooperate with them and follow them voluntarily.”<sup>114</sup> A metric to measure legitimacy consists of “public ‘trust’ and ‘confidence’ in police,” namely that “the police perform their job well, that they are honest and they can secure public confidence in their ability to perform.”<sup>115</sup> As Sargeant et al. contend, an effective internal security strategy “requires the ongoing support and voluntary cooperation of the public.”<sup>116</sup>

Intelligence gathering capabilities consists of security forces’ ability to use intelligence and good information collecting practices to collect information on and effectively track criminal threats. A high rating would be given to a security force defined by what Janet Evans and Mark Kebbell call “being an intelligence-led organization,” which consists of “having an organization for which intelligence is part of the way they think, is inherent in their values and is a way of doing business.”<sup>117</sup> Metrics for information-gathering capabilities include crime clearance rates but analysis also relies on inference based on security structure.

The last indicator, recidivism reduction programs, measures the degree to which internal security strategies recognize the centrality of treatment and reintegration of

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<sup>114</sup> Elise Sargeant, Kristina Murphy, Jacqueline Davis and Lorraine Mazerolle, “Legitimacy and Policing,” in *Policing and Security Practice: Challenges and Achievements*, ed. Tim Prenzler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Janet Evans and Mark Kebbell, “Integrating Intelligence into Policing Practice,” in *Policing and Security Practice: Challenges and Achievements*, ed. Tim Prenzler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 79

delinquents—a security posture especially important for complex social phenomena like gangs, as Luis Preciado argues.<sup>118</sup> In societies where gangs and organized crime pose a threat, security forces, as Jude McCulloch and Sharon Pickering contend, must ““address the broader context in which people commit crimes through a range of social and environmental strategies.””<sup>119</sup> The key metric to measure rehabilitative orientation is the existence of laws, security practices, and state agencies dedicated to pursuing rehabilitation strategies.

## 1. Nicaragua

The first case study centers on Nicaragua. Rankings in each category consist of a qualitative judgment based on the criteria outlined above and fall into one of three categories: High, medium, or low, with high representing the best rating, and low the poorest.

### a. *Community Involvement: HIGH*

The first metric in my analysis involves the level of community buy-in to the state security apparatus. Community buy-in is crucial in states that have authoritarian pasts, since individuals freed from authoritarian regimes have long memories and can be slow to trust even reformed security forces. In Nicaragua, the overthrow of Somoza marked a conscious point of departure from security tactics using repression and torture. As the current head of the PNC, Aminta Granera, a former nun and FSLN revolutionary, stated regarding the establishment of the national police in 1979, “We didn’t know how to be police. We only knew we didn’t want to be like the Somozan Guard.”<sup>120</sup>

A key metric of community buy-in is the citizen approval rating evident in the opinion surveys conducted by LAPOP. On a scale of 1.0 to 7.0, with 7.0 being the

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<sup>118</sup> Luis E. Preciado, “State Approaches Toward Reducing Youth Violence in Honduras and Nicaragua” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2015): 68, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/47317>.

<sup>119</sup> Julie Ayling and Roderic Broadhurst, “The Suppression of Organized Crime: New Approaches and Problems,” in *Policing and Security Practice: Challenges and Achievements*, ed. Tim Prenzler (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 79.

<sup>120</sup> “A Surprising Safe Haven,” *The Economist*, January 28, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21543492>.

highest rating, Nicaraguans ranked the police at a consistently above-average level—between 4.0 and 4.5—during each of the years between 2004 and 2010.<sup>121</sup> Latinobarómetro reports that 37.5% of citizens have a “lot” or “some” trust in the police, contrasted with only 27.4% of El Salvadorans asked the same question.<sup>122</sup>

Community buy-in to Nicaragua’s security force commences with recruitment. According to the *Economist*, local communities must explicitly approve each new recruit to the Nicaraguan PNC.<sup>123</sup> As the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA) notes, the approval process consists of the selection office meeting “with students’ families and community members every six months, in addition to the exams and initial investigation carried out in the candidate’s community.”<sup>124</sup> The PNC also coordinates actions with a cadre of 100,000 volunteers that include students of law and psychology, thousands of ex-gang members who volunteer to mentor youth at sports tournaments, and thousands of victims of domestic violence who share their experiences to deter and educate the population.<sup>125</sup> Nicaragua’s CDCs have been transformed, as Orlando Pérez notes, into “neighborhood watch organizations and then were linked to the National Police after the approval of the 1996 organic law.”<sup>126</sup> Thus, the community not only supports the police and views them as legitimate, but it also has a high level of community involvement in anti-crime activity.

#### ***b. Intelligence Gathering Capabilities: MEDIUM***

The ability of security forces to gather information pertains both to prospective criminals and those who have already committed crimes. Nicaraguan police have one of

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<sup>121</sup> John A. Booth and Mitchell A. Seligson, “Institutional Legitimacy in Central America: 2004–10,” in *Handbook of Central American Governance*, ed. Diego Sánchez Ancochea and Salvador Martí i Puig (New York: Routledge, 2014), 157.

<sup>122</sup> “Online Data Analysis: Confidence in groups-institutions-people: Police,” *Latinobarómetro* 2015, *Corporación Latinobarómetro*, accessed October 10, 2016, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latOnline.jsp>.

<sup>123</sup> *The Economist*, “A Broken System: Citizens’ Security is the Region’s Biggest Problem. Time to Improve Criminal Justice,” July 12, 2014. <http://www.economist.com/news/americas/21606864-citizens-security-regions-biggest-problem-time-improve-criminal-justice-broken>.

<sup>124</sup> Adriana Beltrán, “Protect and Serve? The Status of Police Reform in Central America,” WOLA, June 2009: 16, <https://www.wola.org/analysis/protect-and-serve-the-status-of-police-reform-in-central-america/>.

<sup>125</sup> *The Economist*, “A Broken System.”

<sup>126</sup> Pérez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies*, 75.

the highest crime-clearance rates in Central America at 81%, just slightly below the regional high of Costa Rica at 82%.<sup>127</sup> Internal security forces in Nicaragua also have a robust information-gathering network based on constructive relationships with citizens. The police have worked to identify potential delinquents and collect intelligence with this citizen cooperation. As Cruz points out, the state excels at “involving citizens in crime prevention committees—not in mere neighborhood watch groups—in the development of local safety strategies.”<sup>128</sup>

There is a dark side to Nicaragua’s effective information gathering capabilities under President Daniel Ortega that prevents the state from achieving a “high” rating in this category. President Ortega in 2007 established Citizen Power Councils (CPC) to replace the CDCs as the means of FSLN consolidation of power. Months after Ortega established the CPCs in December 2007, the New York Times reported that political opponents in Nicaragua feared that the CPCs would ensure the “Ortega’s administration’s drift toward an authoritarian and secretive government that does not have to answer to the legislature.”<sup>129</sup> Many fear that the CPCs will engage in authoritarian measures to silence dissent and ensure pro-FLSN candidates retain power on local and regional levels.<sup>130</sup>

#### *c. Recidivism Reduction Programs: HIGH*

Nicaragua’s national police force has avoided the zero-tolerance *mano dura* policies of the Northern Triangle states. José Luis Rocha accurately characterizes Nicaragua’s approach as “neither the strong arm nor the benevolent hand.” Rocha discovered through his research and contacts within the National Police the existence of two distinct networks of police officers.<sup>131</sup> The first network draws from the traditional

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<sup>127</sup> Leggett, “Crime and Development in Central America,” 31.

<sup>128</sup> Cruz, “Organized Civil Society and Gangs,” 143–44.

<sup>129</sup> James C. McKinley Jr., “Nicaraguan Councils Stir Fear of Dictatorship,” *The New York Times*, May 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/americas/04nicaragua.html?r=0&pagewanted=print>. For a more on Nicaraguan fears regarding the CPCs, see Gertsch, “De los CDS a los CPC,” cited above.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> José Rocha Gómez, “Mapping the Labyrinth from Within: The Political Economy of Nicaraguan Youth Policy Concerning Violence,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26, no.4 (2007): 543. DOI:10.1111/j.1470-9856.2007.00236.x.

Nicaraguan elite and focuses more on the maintenance of public order through firm law-and-order policies, like distributing to the media intimidating videos of officers forcefully arresting juvenile gang members.<sup>132</sup> The second network draws from the FSLN elite and maintains informal contacts with gangs.<sup>133</sup> According to Rocha, the Sandinista network within the police is responsible for approaching the issue of gang violence from a sociological and rehabilitative perspective.<sup>134</sup> Rocha contends that the National Police approached the issue of gang violence in a distinctively sophisticated and rehabilitative manner:

The Sandinista elite's ability to use sociological terms and concepts and their notoriously superior discursive capacity in relation to their Central American colleagues enabled the appearance of innovative proposals and an assessment of citizen security that deepened the analysis of youth gangs without criminalising their members.<sup>135</sup>

One example of this involved Managua's Police District II that created a "desalzamiento" propaganda campaign to encourage delinquent youth to "end your rebellion."<sup>136</sup> The strategy involved three phases, including "truce, armistice, and reintegration into the work force." Ungar and Arias point to another example of Nicaragua's rehabilitative approach: "Nicaragua's *Plan de Acción y Exposición 'Policia-Comunidad,'*" (Community-police action plan and exhibition), "for example, focuses on juvenile delinquency, education and reintegration into society by gang members and other young offenders."<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> José Luis Rocha Gómez, "The Political Economy of Nicaragua's Institutional and Organisational Framework for Dealing with Youth Violence," *Crisis States Programme, Working papers series 1*, no. 65 (June 2005): 5. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28182/>.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Mark Ungar and Enrique Desmond Arias, "Reassessing Community-Oriented Policing in Latin America," *Policing and Society* 22, no.1 (2011): 8. DOI:10.1080/10439463.2011.597856.

## 2. El Salvador

Having evaluated Nicaragua, I now use the same criteria to assess El Salvador. As before, rankings in each category consist of a qualitative judgment based on the criteria outlined above. The three categories remain—from best to worst qualitatively—high, medium, and low.

### a. *Community Involvement: LOW*

The Chapultepec Peace Accords laid the groundwork for improving and professionalizing the police force in El Salvador, but the police as an institution suffer from corruption, incompetence, and trust deficits. According to LAPOP’s surveys between 2004 and 2010, citizens’ trust in the police declined from a high of 4.6 out of 7.0 in 2004 to 3.9 as of 2010.<sup>138</sup> In 2015, Latinobarómetro reported that only 27.4% of El Salvadorans had a “lot” or “some” trust in the police, contrasted with 37.5% for Nicaraguans asked the same question.<sup>139</sup> In 2013, Amnesty International issued a statement condemning El Salvador’s ongoing record of impunity for human rights violators from the civil war period.<sup>140</sup> El Salvador has yet to overcome the legacy of impunity embodied by the amnesty law following the UN Truth Commission’s report in 1993 that granted immunity to regime actors found to have committed crimes during the civil war period.<sup>141</sup> Low citizen confidence in the efficacy of the police is evident in the common practice of hiring of private security guards, which outnumber national police at 28,600 to 22,000 police.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Booth and Seligson, “Institutional Legitimacy,” 154.

<sup>139</sup> “Online Data Analysis: Confidence in groups-institutions-people: Police.”

<sup>140</sup> “El Salvador: No Justice 20 Years on from UN Truth Commission,” Amnesty International, press release, March 15, 2013. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2013/03/el-salvador-no-justice-years-un-truth-commission/>.

<sup>141</sup> Clare Ribando Seelke, “El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service*, May 19, 2015, 12. <https://www.hsl.org/?abstract&did=766541>.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

***b. Intelligence Gathering Capabilities: LOW***

El Salvador's police force suffers from endemic resource shortfalls, with most of the money used for salaries and benefits of the officers.<sup>143</sup> Resource constraints, corruption, and poor police training lead to crime clearance rates as low as 5%.<sup>144</sup> Such low crime clearance rates suggest, at least in part, a police force that lacks a methodology of sound information-gathering procedures. A 2009 Strategic Plan for the police in El Salvador written by the PNC itself identifies the low "development of police investigation and intelligence" as a key problem.<sup>145</sup> Low rates of crime clearance also point to the poor working relationship between the judiciary and the police, as Seelke notes.<sup>146</sup> Due to police ineptitude, the government has repeatedly resorted to the military to police the streets and counter gangs and organized crime. Using the military constitutes an imperfect fix that brings about concerns of its own, especially given El Salvador's problematic history with human rights abuses.<sup>147</sup> One sign of hope emerged with the passing of a new law that raises taxes to pay for "police, investigators and other security institutions" by raising taxes on wealthy individuals and large companies.<sup>148</sup>

***c. Recidivism Reduction Programs: LOW***

As Cruz points out, El Salvador "brags about developing programs through which thousands of gang members have been captured, while their prevention and rehabilitation programs have been relegated to a secondary level."<sup>149</sup> The rehabilitation programs have "neither the resources nor results to show for;" in 2005, for instance, the government recorded having arrested 14,000 gang members and treated just 45 in the school-farm

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<sup>143</sup> Seelke, "El Salvador: Background," 9.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>145</sup> Marcela Donadio, *Public Security Index: Central America: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama* (Buenos Aires, Argentina: RESDAL, 2013), 55. <http://www.resdal.org/libro-seg-2013/resdal-index-2013.pdf>.

<sup>146</sup> Seelke, "El Salvador: Background and U.S. Relations," 10.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>148</sup> "El Salvador Congress Approves Tax Package to Fight Violent Crime," *Stabroek News*, October 31, 2015, <http://www.stabroeknews.com/2015/news/regional/10/31/el-salvador-congress-approves-tax-package-to-fight-violent-crime/>.

<sup>149</sup> Cruz, "Organized Civil-Society and Gangs," 134.

rehabilitative program.<sup>150</sup> Some signs of hope are visible, however, leading to El Salvador avoiding a pure “low” rating in this category. On October 26, 2015, El Salvador’s Security and Justice Minister formally presented Congress with a proposed law that would allow gang members to avoid terrorism charges that carry long minimum prison sentences, as long as they have not committed serious offenses like homicides.<sup>151</sup> The proposed law, formally called the “Gang Reinsertion Law,” faces considerable obstacles in the form of funding, the lack of which Michael Lohmuller argues caused the gang truce to fizzle in 2012.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, initiatives like this at least suggest security officials are beginning to recognize the importance of rehabilitative policies toward gangs.

### 3. Summary of Findings: Internal Security Approaches

The multidimensional variable of internal security approaches was ascertained by looking at community involvement, intelligence capacity and recidivism programs in each country. As Table 4 indicates, Nicaragua attained a HIGH overall rating, while El Salvador earned a LOW rating. Thus, if the rational choice criminology hypothesis is correct, Nicaragua should have lower violence rates than in El Salvador. As indicated by the homicide rates in Table 5, the findings correlate with the outcome predicted by the rational choice criminology hypothesis. Nicaragua’s criminological approaches correlate with a homicide rate of 8 per 100,000, while El Salvador’s correlate with a homicide rate of 103 per 100,000.

Table 4. Internal Security Approaches in Nicaragua and El Salvador

	Community Involvement	Intelligence Capacity	Recidivism Reduction Programs	Strength of Criminological Approaches
<b>Nicaragua</b>	MEDIUM	HIGH	HIGH	<i>HIGH</i>
<b>El Salvador</b>	LOW	LOW	LOW	<i>LOW</i>

<sup>150</sup> Cruz, “Organized Civil-Society and Gangs,” 134.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Lohmuller, “El Salvador Proposes Gang Rehabilitation Law,” *InSight Crime*, October 29, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-proposes-gang-rehabilitation-law>.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

Table 5. Comparative Homicide Rates, 2015, per 100,000 Inhabitants<sup>153</sup>

Nicaragua	El Salvador
8	103

### C. CONCLUSION: ASSESSING THE RATIONAL CHOICE CRIMINOLOGY HYPOTHESIS

This chapter tested the rational choice criminology hypothesis in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador by conducting, first, a historical inquiry and, second, an evaluation of criminological approaches. The first part of the chapter examined how Nicaragua's community-based, intelligence-centric security approach originated in the period following the 1979 revolution against Somoza and the FSLN consolidation of political control. Central to Nicaragua's model was the creation of the CDS that constituted far-reaching, community-based security structures tied to public assistance programs. Additionally, the newly created PNC emphasized education and sound policing strategies. After the democratic transition these community-based organizations were effectively modified to deal with emerging threats. CDSs were transformed into neighborhood watch organizations and subsumed under the capable PNC. On the contrary, El Salvador's security forces developed an adversarial, counterinsurgent-dominated approach during the 1980s civil war period. This history would undermine the security sector's attempt to form sound criminological approaches after the Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992, which reorganized, restructured, and redefined El Salvador's security forces. The second part of the chapter confirmed, through an evaluation of indicators of sound criminological approaches, a positive correlation between the quality of internal security approaches and lower incidences of violent crime. Highly violent El Salvador scored worse in each indicator than did Nicaragua, the country with the region's lowest homicide rate.

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<sup>153</sup> Gagne, "InSight Crime 2015 Homicide Round-up."

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## IV. EVALUATING THE INSTITUTIONALIST HYPOTHESIS

The previous chapter tested the rational choice criminology hypothesis and affirmed its validity vis-à-vis Nicaragua and El Salvador: sound criminological approaches correlated with violent crime outcomes as expected. Using the same case studies, this chapter assesses the validity of the institutionalist hypothesis, which posits that states with superior security institutions should have lower violence rates, while states with inferior security institutions should have higher violence rates. In the chapter's first part, I use Bruneau and Matei's indicator of effectiveness to evaluate the quality of each country's security institutions. The findings corroborate the hypothesis's predicted outcome: in the aggregate, less violent Nicaragua scores higher in institutional effectiveness than more violent El Salvador. The chapter's second part seeks to account for the present institutional outcomes using a historical path-dependency analysis. The findings indicate that the method of institutional reform during each country's democratic transition emerges as the key independent variable. Specifically, following El Salvador's systematic use of terror during the civil war of the 1980s, negotiators prioritized the purification of state security institutions at the expense of effectiveness. To the contrary, Nicaraguan security institutions benefited from continuity and stability during the democratic transition.

### A. ASSESSMENT OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS: PLANS, STRUCTURES, AND RESOURCES

This section assesses the quality of security institutions in Nicaragua and El Salvador using the criterion of effectiveness established by Bruneau and Matei.<sup>154</sup> Elaborating on the criterion of institutional effectiveness, Matei has proposed three indicators: plans, structures, and resources.<sup>155</sup> Each of the three indicators is characterized by specific benchmarks.

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<sup>154</sup> Bruneau, "The Hedgehog and the Fox Revisited," 122.

<sup>155</sup> Matei, "A New Conceptualization," 32.

The first indicator, plans, refers to the quality of a state's policies and strategies in relation to law enforcement and crime prevention.<sup>156</sup> Internal security plans should reflect cogent strategies, doctrine, tactics, and programs that not only include sound policing strategies but also security approaches shared across government agencies. Second, structures include the processes “to both formulate the plans and implement them,” usually in the form of effective state agencies that develop and coordinate security policies throughout the government.<sup>157</sup> Structures also pertain to the efficacy of training, institutional knowledge, technical capabilities, criminal justice coordination, and the other indicators of institutional proficiencies. Third, Matei defines resources as “political capital, money, and personnel” that allow forces to “implement the assigned roles and missions.”<sup>158</sup> The resources indicator not only refers to whether institutions are backed by adequate resources, but also whether those resources are allocated in an appropriate and efficient manner

## **1. El Salvador**

This section commences with an evaluation of El Salvador based on the criteria outlined above. I use Matei’s ranking terminology of *Low*, *Medium*, and *High*, with low as worst and high as best qualitatively. Each ranking is determined through a qualitative assessment.

### **a. *Plans: Low***

Since the Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992, El Salvador’s policy development agencies have been weak and ineffective. The National Public Security Council (CNSP) of 1996 was designed, largely due to international pressure as WOLA reports, to “analyze the public security situation and develop policies and strategies for the medium to long term,” yet the government minister in charge neutralized and obstructed the CNSP.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, in 1999, the government charged the CNSP with developing preventative

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<sup>156</sup> Matei, “A New Conceptualization,” 32.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 27.

strategies, but WOLA points out that the CNSP was “excluded from major decision making to such an extent that it has had serious disagreements with governmental actions,” including the government’s primary anti-gang *Mano Dura* initiative.<sup>160</sup> As Edgardo Alberto Amaya points out, opportunists capitalized on public fear during the aftermath of the peace accords to militarize internal security: “The alarm over insecurity was one of the arguments conservatives used to sabotage and distort the new security model.”<sup>161</sup> As a result, El Salvador lacks proactive and preventative anti-gang policies, including preventative and rehabilitative strategies, and fails to coordinate effective interagency plans.<sup>162</sup>

Lacking proactive internal security plans, El Salvador has relied on reactive *Mano Dura* strategies that incriminate and incarcerate gang members. International initiatives, like the Inter-American Development Bank’s \$45 million (IDB) Violence Prevention Strategy Comprehensive Support Program of 2014, are trying to instill internal security plans that include preventative and rehabilitative measures.<sup>163</sup> The government also announced in 2014 a community policing initiative for San Salvador involving thousands of retrained officers; however, the precise structure of community coordination, as well as the program’s results, remain unclear.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, as a recent illustration of the continued influence of *Mano Dura* strategies, in May 2016, El Salvadoran Vice President Ortiz publicly asserted gangs would be defeated within a year by stricter penalties and more restrictive incarceration policies.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 27.

<sup>161</sup> Edgardo Alberto Amaya, “Security Policies in El Salvador,” in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 134.

<sup>162</sup> Preciado, “State Approaches toward Reducing Youth Violence,” 68.

<sup>163</sup> “ES-L1025: Violence Prevention Strategy Comprehensive Support Program,” Inter-American Development Bank, accessed September 15, 2016, [http://www.iadb.org/en/projects/project-description-title\\_1303.html?id=ES-L1025](http://www.iadb.org/en/projects/project-description-title_1303.html?id=ES-L1025).

<sup>164</sup> Camilo Mejía Giraldo, “El Salvador Community Police Force: A Sign of What Is to Come?,” *InSight Crime*, last modified August 12, 2014, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-community-police-force-a-sign-of-what-is-to-come>.

<sup>165</sup> Sam Tabory, “El Salvador Gangs Will Be ‘Defeated’ Within a Year: Government,” *InSight Crime*, May 13, 2016, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-announces-12-month-timeframe-for-confronting-gangs>.

Table 6. Key Police Statistics, 2013<sup>166</sup>

	Average Monthly Salary (USD)	Percent of Budget for Security Forces	Total Police Officers	Number of Police per 100,000 inhabitants	Percentage of Female Police Officers
<b>Nicaragua</b>	\$120	63.6%	11,732	1.9	30%
<b>El Salvador</b>	\$424	64.7%	22,055	3.5	10.5%

**b. Structures: Low**

As Amaya observes, “the PNC’s centralized organization and its internal politics have been barriers to creating a coordination mechanism linking local governments, the police, and other centralized institutions to orchestrate efforts to prevent and treat local problems.”<sup>167</sup> The lack of structural coordination has undermined the criminal justice system such that, as a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report from 2007 detailed, “In most of the cases analyzed, there is no sign that the prosecutor systematically directed the investigation, nor that the police obeyed the prosecution’s instructions.”<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the attorney general and the national police have a poor working relationship, as WOLA notes, such that there is no “established, permanent, and systematic mechanism for communicating and defining common objectives, priorities, and mutual support at all levels.”<sup>169</sup> Structural problems undermine the rule of law in El Salvador, with only 37 percent of victims bothering to report crimes, of which 60 percent never make it into the judicial system.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Donadio, *Public Security Index*, 13–14.

<sup>167</sup> Amaya, “Security Policies in El Salvador,” 144.

<sup>168</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 31.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 30–31.

On a structural level vis-à-vis the national police, El Salvador's Strategic Institutional Plan 2009–2014 indicates several deficiencies in the police force including “lack of incentives,” “little development of police investigation and intelligence,” “lack of standardization in the databases,” “fragmented organization,” and “lack of training.”<sup>171</sup> Poor administration and lack of uniformity in the collection of evidence also hinder the police.<sup>172</sup> As previously discussed, policy development organizations like the CNSP have been structurally obstructed from coordinating a preventative security strategy with the competent security institutions. El Salvador's *Mano Dura* strategy has tried to make up for structural inadequacies, pushing constitutional limitations on the military's role in internal policing. In 2015, the president ordered up to 7,000 of the military's total force of 25,000 to patrol the streets.<sup>173</sup>

Table 7. Length of Police Training<sup>174</sup>

	<b>Basic Training</b>	<b>Specialized Training</b>	<b>Advanced Training Required for Promotion?</b>
<b>Nicaragua</b>	4 years at National Police Academy	Many programs available, up to 5 years duration	Yes
<b>El Salvador</b>	9 months classroom, 3 months on-the-job	Sub-inspectors have 2-year course; limited for most other officers	No

*c. Resources: Low*

Another challenge has been a deficit of political capital, personnel, and money—the three resource criteria outlined by Matei—that afflict security institutions in El Salvador.<sup>175</sup> Politically, *Mano Dura* remains popular, and politicians lack the will and

<sup>171</sup> Donadio, *Public Security Index*, 55.

<sup>172</sup> Perez, *Civil Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies*, 63.

<sup>173</sup> Watts, “One Murder Every Hour.”

<sup>174</sup> Data extracted from current section.

<sup>175</sup> Matei, “A New Conceptualization,” 32.

incentive to invest in long-term preventative security strategies. The result is a status quo that favors heavy-handed, reactive solutions. A newspaper correspondent in San Salvador illustrates the chaotic security situation that has become accepted as the norm:

Schools are protected by barbed wire and often patrolled by soldiers; private security guards carrying shotguns man the entrance to major businesses and police, armed with rifles, conduct random checks on the highways....it is not uncommon to see soldiers in balaclavas riding on the back of flat-bed trucks mounted with heavy machine guns. Few people pay them a second glance.<sup>176</sup>

Reflective of the government's infatuation with ongoing *Mano Dura* strategies, resource allocation flows to elite militarized units, as WOLA observes, "due to the political backing they enjoy."<sup>177</sup> Moreover, U.S. assistance has most often focused on the training and equipping of such specialized units, including anti-gang workshops sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the U.S.-funded International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Santa Tecla, as well as the FBI's direct involvement in combined units like the Transnational Anti-Gang unit (TAG).<sup>178</sup>

Pertaining to personnel, crucial investigative training in the civilian police force is poorly funded, leaving officers ill equipped to handle the most fundamental aspects of police work. Pre-commissioning education consists of nine months of instruction followed by three months of on-the-job training, while continuing education is optional and of poor quality.<sup>179</sup> According to a study by the El Salvadoran *Fundación de Estudios para la Aplicación del Derecho* (FESPAD) (Foundation for the study and application of law) the PNC is "better trained for carrying out detentions, interventions, and patrol operations" than "interaction with the community through community policing."<sup>180</sup> Moreover, a 2007 study by UNDP consultants revealed "major deficiencies in basic investigative techniques," including "crime scene preservation and fingerprinting,

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<sup>176</sup> Watts, "One Murder Every Hour."

<sup>177</sup> Beltrán, "Protect and Serve?," 31.

<sup>178</sup> Roberto J. Atha, "Transitions to Peace Effects on Internal Security Forces in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2008), 36.

<sup>179</sup> Beltrán, "Protect and Serve?," 11.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

evidence gathering, alteration of crime scenes, and weaknesses in the identification of, search for, and interviewing of witnesses.”<sup>181</sup> Basic training for investigators lasts only three weeks, although some specialized courses are available at the International Law Enforcement Academy in Santa Tecla, as well as via various international programs.<sup>182</sup> Still, investigative agencies do not have sufficient manpower to meet requirements. The deputy director of investigations, according to WOLA, “acknowledged that ‘in general, there are deficits at every level....There is a substantial deficiency with respect to the number of staff assigned to cases.’”<sup>183</sup>

Table 8. National Police Promotion Process<sup>184</sup>

Nicaragua	El Salvador
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion process mostly transparent and accords with codified law</li> <li>• Largely merit-based</li> <li>• Increased political meddling in process since FSLN’s Ortega returned to presidency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion process frequently arbitrary, through legislative decrees</li> <li>• Accusations of favoritism for pre-Chapultepec officers</li> <li>• Reprisals and intimidation common</li> </ul>

Financially, as the Latin American Security and Defense Network (RESDAL) has reported, the PNC asserts that its “limited operational budget” cripples its ability to carry out missions effectively.<sup>185</sup> The chronic lack of resources allocated to the internal security is apparent by the fact that private security guards outnumber police 28,600 to 22,000.<sup>186</sup> The government has traditionally been reluctant to raise taxes to finance deficiencies and instead prefers to borrow from the U.S. government, the World Bank,

<sup>181</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 31.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 17–19.

<sup>185</sup> Donadio, *Public Security Index*, 55.

<sup>186</sup> Seelke, “El Salvador,” 9.

and other international donors, which have often fallen short of commitments.<sup>187</sup> A reversal of this tendency occurred in October 2015, when El Salvador’s Congress passed a major tax on corporations and communications services to be used, as Reuters reported, “to fund police, investigators and other security institutions.”<sup>188</sup> Although potentially a positive development, the law’s effect remains to be seen, and few details are available about the extent of revenues that will be generated.<sup>189</sup> Some other areas of improvement include improvements in technical systems that support investigative work and database maintenance.<sup>190</sup>

Table 9. Key Internal Security Structure Considerations<sup>191</sup>

	<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>El Salvador</b>
<b>Military Involvement in Policing</b>	Limited to agricultural security; approx.. 2,000 troops	Widespread, urban and rural use of military in policing as part of <i>Mano Dura</i> policies; as many as 7,000 troops
<b>Community-based Coordination Structures</b>	Network of crime prevention committees, neighborhood watch groups, political organizations; decades of experience	Limited and inconsistent due to centralized structure of PNC; community policing initiatives in San Salvador from 2014 show unclear results

<sup>187</sup> Atha, “Transitions to Peace Effects,” 13–14.

<sup>188</sup> “El Salvador Approves Tax Package to Fight Violent Crime,” Reuters, October 30, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-el-salvador-crime-idUSKCN0SO0DO20151030>.

<sup>189</sup> Sam Tabory, “El Salvador’s Proposed Security Tax Stirs Controversy,” *InSight Crime*, last modified June 22, 2015, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/el-salvador-proposed-security-tax-stirs-controversy>.

<sup>190</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 32.

<sup>191</sup> Data extracted from current section.

## 2. Nicaragua

The chapter continues with an evaluation of Nicaragua based on the criteria outlined above. Again I use Matei’s ranking terminology of *Low*, *Medium*, and *High*, with low as worst and high as best based on a qualitative assessment.

### a. *Plans: High*

Rocha commends the “exceptional character of the Nicaraguan police,” especially their “conciliatory discourse and propaganda” and their attempt to “overcome repressive penal models,” instead treating gang members as objects of social rehabilitation.<sup>192</sup> Rocha contends that the National Police approached the issue of gang violence in a distinctively sophisticated manner:

The Sandinista elite’s ability to use sociological terms and concepts and their notoriously superior discursive capacity in relation to their Central American colleagues enabled the appearance of innovative proposals and an assessment of citizen security that deepened the analysis of youth gangs without criminalising their members.<sup>193</sup>

Observing that “effective policy hinges on leadership,” a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report notes that Chief of Police Granera has had more than 30 years of experience in law enforcement—a fact that highlights the continuity of policy and strategies from the Sandinista period through the democratic transition and to the present.<sup>194</sup> In 2014, Granera described the consistent security strategy that she asserts has contributed to Nicaragua’s relatively low violent crime rates as “preventivo, comunitario y proactivo” (preventative, community-based, and proactive).<sup>195</sup> The community-based model of policing represents an adaptation of the Sandinista form of political control. As

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<sup>192</sup> José Luis Rocha, “Street Gangs of Nicaragua,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 116.

<sup>193</sup> Rocha Gómez, “The Political Economy of Nicaragua’s Institutional and Organisational Framework,” 5.

<sup>194</sup> Stephen Johnson, Samuel Kareff, and Siremorn Asvapromtada, “Nicaragua: Lessons from a Country with a Low Crime Rate,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified July 10, 2012, 2. [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/120710\\_Johnson\\_Nicaragua\\_HemFocus.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/120710_Johnson_Nicaragua_HemFocus.pdf).

<sup>195</sup> “PNUD destaca baja tasa.”

outlined in the previous chapter, the Chamorro administration depoliticized the police and transformed the FSLN's community-based CDS organizations into apolitical neighborhood watch groups that liaised with the police.

Nicaragua has been far more proactive in developing internal security plan than El Salvador. In light of the growing menace posed by gang violence, the government completed a diagnostic evaluation of its internal security plans in 1999 and found the need to formulate a comprehensive citizen security plan, which resulted a five-year, \$49.3 million USD plan known as the National Police's Modernization and Development Plan for the Strengthening of Citizen Security.<sup>196</sup> The plan encompassed an array of preventative approaches designed not only prosecute but also deter the proliferation of gangs and related violence. Evincing its comprehensive approach, in 2004 the president ordered the creation of the Division for Coexistence and Citizen Security (DCSC), which identified seven strategic focal points for internal security: drugs, youth violence, domestic violence, robberies, transit security, local community prevention, and social communication.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, the government created the Office of Juvenile Issues as the central node for the development for its preventative model of gang violence prevention.<sup>198</sup> Finally, the Nicaraguan police have, uniquely for Central America, prioritized the role of women; in 1996, the Gender Consultative Council spurred reforms in recruitment and retention of female officers, such that Nicaragua has emerged as the regional leader with females comprising more than 32% of the force and a stated goal of 50%.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Santiago Ramirez, "Violence and Crime in Nicaragua: A Country Profile," Inter-American Development Bank, June 2014, 34. [https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/5770/IDB-DP-306\\_Violence\\_and\\_Crime\\_in\\_Nicaragua.pdf?sequence=1](https://publications.iadb.org/bitstream/handle/11319/5770/IDB-DP-306_Violence_and_Crime_in_Nicaragua.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>198</sup> Rocha, "Street Gangs of Nicaragua," 116.

<sup>199</sup> Beltrán, "Protect and Serve?," 14.

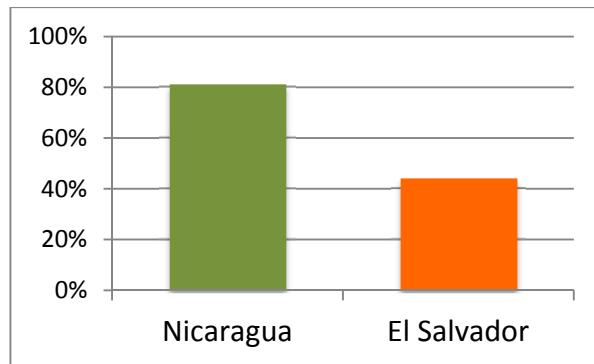


Figure 11. Homicide Clearance Rates (2007)<sup>200</sup>

**b. Structures: Medium**

Nicaragua's police operate independently from the military, which conduct limited internal security missions. Instead, the military's role in internal security is limited to about 2,000 troops who provide security for Nicaragua's coffee production.<sup>201</sup> In contrast to El Salvador, Nicaragua has not used the military for anti-gang and anti-drug policy responses. Instead, the preventative and community-based model of policing have fostered effective civilian-led structures that coordinate internal security policies. As Cruz points out, the state excels at "involving citizens in crime prevention committees—not in mere neighborhood watch groups—in the development of local safety strategies."<sup>202</sup> At the lowest level, Nicaragua has created 2,064 *Comités de Prevención Social del Delito* (Committees on social crime prevention), comprised of 20,000 volunteers that liaise with the police.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, unlike El Salvador, Nicaragua has also invested resources in programs to prevent of gang violence that support its community-oriented approach, including sports tournaments, cooperation with social services volunteers, and scholarships for youth.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Adapted from Leggett, "Crime and Development in Central America," 30–31.

<sup>201</sup> Pérez, *Civil-Military Relations in Post-Conflict Societies*, 75.

<sup>202</sup> Cruz, "Organized Civil-Society and Gangs," 143–44.

<sup>203</sup> Rocha, "Street Gangs of Nicaragua," 118.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

Finally, the police, as Rocha argues, the police have achieved a structural equilibrium between two complementary ideological factions: the traditional elite and the FSLN.<sup>205</sup> The FSLN faction has encouraged the rehabilitative policies toward gangs and resisted pressure from traditional elites who sought to implement policies similar to *Mano Dura*, while the traditional elites have encouraged the development of efficient policing and judicial processes.<sup>206</sup> The FSLN faction continues to advocate for what Mark Ungar describes as the “many strong social programs” from the 1980s that “continue to provide generous support for youth.”<sup>207</sup> The traditional elites meanwhile have pushed for laws like the Integrated Development Plan for the Prevention of Juvenile Violence passed in 1999, which allowed the police to incarcerate suspected gang members without first obtaining warrants, in an effort to “clamp down on visible youth crime and thereby restore a sense of security among the urban populace.”<sup>208</sup>

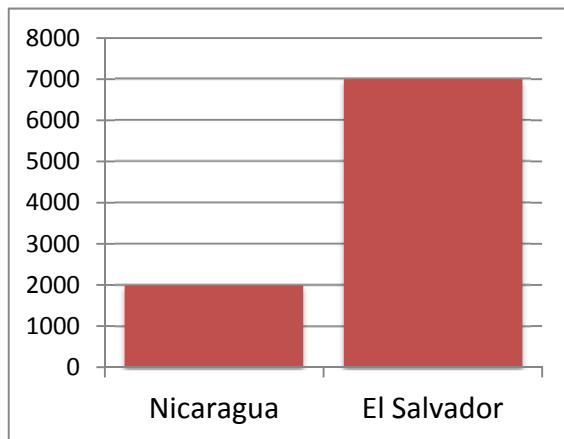


Figure 12. Number of Military Personnel Assigned to Internal Security Missions (2015)<sup>209</sup>

<sup>205</sup> Rocha Gómez, “Mapping the Labyrinth from Within,” 543.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ungar, *Policing Democracy*, 101.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Data extracted from current section.

**c. Resources: Medium**

Whereas political will in El Salvador favors investing in security forces that enforce *Mano Dura* policies, Nicaraguan security institutions are backed by a political will that favors a distribution of resources to support its preventative and community-based approaches. As Cruz points out, while states of the Northern Triangle, like El Salvador, reacted to increased gang activity with *Mano Dura* policies, the approach failed to take root because “the police—which promoted a softer approach—had a significant amount of political power in within the Nicaraguan administration.”<sup>210</sup>

Pertaining to personnel, Nicaragua created a more rigorous education and training its police force than El Salvador, as summarized in Table 6 above. In contrast to El Salvador, the Nicaraguan PNC has a rigorous education program for both accession and ongoing career development. Initial training consists of four-year degrees at the National Police Academy leading to commissioning.<sup>211</sup> Additionally, unlike El Salvador, the government funds high-quality continuing education courses mandatory for career progression. Continuing education opportunities include specialized skill courses; refresher training; and formal five-month, three-year, and five-year curricula.<sup>212</sup> The Nicaraguan academy also offers courses dedicated to the science of community policing, another feature that differentiates police education from El Salvador.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, Nicaragua has dedicated police units that focus on violence prevention in relation to women and children.<sup>214</sup>

Financially, on the surface Nicaragua’s low ratio of police officers to population suggests a paucity of resource allocation to internal security. As a 2012 CSIS report indicates, Nicaragua’s ratio of police officers to population, at 180 per 100,000 people, is less than half of the Latin American regional median of 284 per 100,000, which is close

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<sup>210</sup> José Miguel Cruz, “Government Responses and the Dark Side of Gang Suppression,” in *Maras: Gang Violence and Security in Central America*, eds. Thomas Bruneau, Lucía Dammert, and Elizabeth Skinner (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 147.

<sup>211</sup> Preciado, “State Approaches,” 57.

<sup>212</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 16.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Johnson, Kareff, Asvapromtada, “Nicaragua,” 1.

to El Salvador's level.<sup>215</sup> Nevertheless, even though Nicaragua's security budget has remained steady at an average of 1.2% of GDP between the years 2005 and 2013, the share of the budget allotted to the PNC has risen by 64% over the same eight years, a larger increase than any other Nicaraguan security organization.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, as Bruneau notes, Nicaragua's tax revenue as a percentage of GDP suggests that the state has greater extractive capacity and thus comparatively more resources to allocate than does El Salvador.<sup>217</sup> Nicaragua collects 26% of its GDP in taxes annually, compared with just 19.4% in El Salvador.<sup>218</sup> Moreover, focusing strictly on the level of police funding cannot account for the structural composition of internal security that CSIS labels a "preventative and communitarian approach to law enforcement."<sup>219</sup>

### 3. Summary of Findings: Institutional Effectiveness

As Table 10 demonstrates, Nicaraguan internal security institutions are more effective than those of El Salvador in that superior plans, structures, and resources characterize the former.

Table 10. Institutional Effectiveness of Internal Security Forces in El Salvador and Nicaragua

	Plans	Structures	Resources	Overall Effectiveness
<b>El Salvador</b>	LOW	LOW	LOW	<i>LOW</i>
<b>Nicaragua</b>	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	<i>MEDIUM</i>

<sup>215</sup> Johnson, Kareff, Asvapromtada, "Nicaragua," 1.

<sup>216</sup> Donadio, *Public Security Index*, 117.

<sup>217</sup> Thomas Bruneau, "Street Gangs in Central America: Combating them with Intelligence Fusion Centers," *E-International Relations*, last modified March 8, 2014, <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/08/street-gangs-in-central-america-combating-them-with-intelligence-fusion-centers/>.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> Johnson, Kareff, Asvapromtada, "Nicaragua," 1.

This section evaluated the variable of internal security institution using the Bruneau-Matei model that focuses on the indicators of plans, structures, and resources. The findings corroborate the institutionalist hypothesis that would expect less violent Nicaragua to have more effective security institutions than more violent El Salvador. Having established where each state ranks on an institutional basis, the next section seeks to account for the historical factors that have influenced the observed divergent levels of institutional effectiveness.

## **B. COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL ANALYSIS: INSTITUTIONAL REFORM AND EFFECTIVENESS**

This section focuses on the institutional transition to democracy in the beginning of the 1990s, a critical period that shaped the configuration of plans, structures, and resources of security institutions in the present era. The method of security sector transition into the democratic era emerges as a significant independent variable that best accounts for institutional evolution to the current state of effectiveness. El Salvador's democratic transition emerged from a negotiated settlement at the Chapultepec Peace Accords that prioritized purification over effectiveness. The reform process consisted of formal peace negotiations involving two sides of a protracted civil war—the FMLN and the government. On the contrary, Nicaragua's democratic transition involved the peaceful relinquishing of FSLN power following President Chamorro's election in 1990. Chamorro's administration did not see security institutions as requiring massive reform and purification, which instead underwent informally negotiated transitions in many key areas, including the police, civil defense committees, and criminology approaches. Throughout the transition, institutional effectiveness was prioritized. This section begins with El Salvador and then moves to analyze Nicaragua.

### **1. Prioritizing Purification: Reforming El Salvador's Security Institutions**

The genesis of El Salvador's security institution reforms—the Chapultepec Peace Accords—cannot be understood without the context of the civil war that immediately preceded it and, particularly, the regime's use of state terrorism. Michael Tigar defines

state terrorism as systematic and deliberate “state-sponsored violence, conducted against political enemies, and in disregard of historically determined fair substantive procedural standards.”<sup>220</sup> Christian Davenport finds that El Salvador’s security institutions unquestionably employed state terror against the FMLN during the civil war. One aspect of Davenport’s analysis of state repression uses the scale popularized by Poe and Tate to measure ““personal integrity violation”” also known as the “Political Terror Scale (PTS).”<sup>221</sup> Davenport classified El Salvador’s regime during the period from 1978–1992 as a level four out of five, with five constituting the most extreme form of personal integrity violations.<sup>222</sup> For a state in this category, according to Davenport, imprisonment, murders, and disappearances “are a common part of life” for those “who interest themselves in politics or ideas” opposed to the regime.<sup>223</sup>

In its determination to defeat the FMLN, a powerful military-dominated regime often undertook actions classified as state terrorism. David Pion-Berlin argues that regimes engage in a two-step process to decide whether to use terror as a form of political control: first, they evaluate the nature of the threat, and then they conduct a cost-benefit analysis of using terror.<sup>224</sup> In essence, Pion-Berlin contends that regimes that “practice state terror do so because they feel threatened,” and they judge the benefits to outweigh the risks.<sup>225</sup> To evaluate the threat, regimes conduct a “series of cautious estimates,” to include assessing the threat of the opponent, judging the opponent’s motives and intentions, weighing the nature of opposition actions, determining the timing of the threat, and lastly examining whether the threat is directed at the government.<sup>226</sup> If the

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<sup>220</sup> Michael E. Tigar, *Thinking About Terrorism: The Threat to Civil Liberties in Times of National Emergency* (Chicago: ABA Publishing, 2007), 25.

<sup>221</sup> Christian Davenport, *State Repression and the Domestic Democratic Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> David Pion-Berlin, *The Ideology of State Terror: Economic Doctrine and Political Repression in Argentina and Peru* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1989), 5–7.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

regime deems the threat sufficiently grave, the governing elites then “weigh the benefits and risks associated with terror before choosing a course of action.”<sup>227</sup>

Pion-Berlin’s paradigm frames the context in which El Salvador’s regime during the late 1970s and early 1980s formulated its policy of state terrorism. The military authoritarian state faced an imminent threat from a well-financed, well-armed, and vast FMLN army. As outlined in a previous chapter, the threat met Pion-Berlin’s criteria: the FMLN constituted a well-organized, intentional, imminent, grave, and direct menace.

Indeed, El Salvador’s regime and its agents actively employed several terror tactics, including disappearances, torture, and extrajudicial killing. As Americas Watch relates, the military regime and its death squads not only murdered political opponents but also “adopted such theatrics as publishing lists of future victims, sending their targets invitations to their own funerals, and delivering coffins to their doorsteps,” as well as mutilating victims’ bodies and phoning death threats to “subversives.”<sup>228</sup> The state was actively involved in the use of terror, notwithstanding attempts to obfuscate ties to state actors. For instance, the use of “death squads,” as Americas Watch argues, consisted of “plainclothes units of the armed forces that avoid accountability by such means as using vehicles with smoked-glass windows and without numbered license plates.”<sup>229</sup> Meeting Tigar’s criterion that terror should not simply constitute a divergence from the accepted norms by a minority of bad actors, the military regime never prosecuted any death squad members or others involved in the employment of terror tactics. On the contrary, death squads and their ilk operated “day and night without interference from the security forces, a fact showing, at a minimum, the complicity of those forces.”<sup>230</sup> Moreover, the U.S. Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Intelligence Oversight released a fact sheet in

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<sup>227</sup> Pion-Berlin, *Ideology of State Terror*, 6.

<sup>228</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador’s Decade of Terror: Human Rights Since the Assassination of Archbishop Romero* (Binghamton, NY: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 22.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 22.

1992 admitting that U.S. training manuals for El Salvador's security forces contained language inconsistent with U.S. policies against torture.<sup>231</sup>

Against the backdrop of state repression and terrorism, the Chapultepec Peace Accords faced a decision common to countries transitioning from similar regimes to a democratic form of governance. As argued in Neil Kritz's *Transitional Justice*, states transitioning from repressive pasts face a decision about how best to deal with crimes while also forging institutions that have the trust of citizens—a critical decision that shapes the contours of the subsequent regime's institutions.<sup>232</sup> As Kritz argues, the method of achieving transitional justice can vary on a spectrum of options, from vigorously prosecuting offenders and meticulously purifying security institutions, on one end, to offering amnesty for human rights abusers and leaving security structures largely in unchanged, as the other extreme.<sup>233</sup> For El Salvador, negotiators settled on the more extreme form of purification of security institutions, while also offering amnesty to many offenders. This rigid institutional purification, and the particular method of implementation of reforms, contributed to ineffectiveness of security institutions reflected in the previous section.

El Salvador's transition process centered on the UN-sponsored Chapultepec Peace Accords of 1992. The finalized accords emerged from two years of negotiations between the government and the FMLN insurgents.<sup>234</sup> Reforms were ambitious in scope with a number of specific goals pertaining to the purification of security institutions, including reforming military doctrine, altering military education, purifying security forces of human rights abusers, reducing prerogatives, eliminating paramilitary actors (like the infamous death squads), and creating a civilian-led, professionalized national police.<sup>235</sup> Like many states attempting to implement transitional justice, El Salvador's military

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<sup>231</sup> Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense, *Fact Sheet Concerning Training Manuals*.

<sup>232</sup> Neil J. Kritz, "The Dilemmas of Transitional Justice," in *General Considerations*, vol. I of *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, ed. Neil J. Kritz (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1996), xxi-xxii.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> United Nations, *Chapultepec Peace Agreement*.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

reorganized after the peace accords to include equal representation of former guerilla insurgents. The accords called for the establishment of the PNC with a central focus on protecting human rights—an effort to prevent the recurrence of the widespread torture and killings of state security forces and death squads during the civil war.<sup>236</sup>

Notwithstanding the honorable intentions of the reforms, some key conditions prioritized purification at the expense of effective plans, structures, and resources. As Amaya notes, the “reform had profound significance since it was not limited merely to the construction of a new police force but also involved a radical break from security policy as practiced prior to the accords.”<sup>237</sup> Experienced personnel and structures were disbanded entirely, including the Treasury Police, National Police, and the National Guard.<sup>238</sup> Additionally, the reforms eliminated technical expertise embodied by the members of El Salvador’s Special Investigative Unit (DIU) and Executive Anti-Narcotics Unit (UEA).<sup>239</sup> Another condition insisted upon by the FMLN demanded that the leader of El Salvador’s newly created PNC could have no ties to the previous security apparatus.<sup>240</sup> As indicated previously, the first director of the PNC, a businessman, had no prior police experience and consequently had no experience on which to rely for the development of a security strategy.<sup>241</sup> In a similar vein, the FMLN insisted that the PNC be comprised of mostly civilians with no prior background in policing, with the exception of 20 percent of the top positions allotted to both the security forces of the former regime and the FMLN.<sup>242</sup> Moreover, many of the FMLN applicants lacked the necessary educational backgrounds, further diluting the capabilities of the new force.<sup>243</sup> As a contemporary U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report indicates, reforms

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<sup>236</sup> United Nations, *Chapultepec Peace Agreement*.

<sup>237</sup> Amaya, “Security Policies in El Salvador,” 134.

<sup>238</sup> Atha, “Transition to Peace Effects,” 31.

<sup>239</sup> United Nations, *Chapultepec Peace Agreement*.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> “Aid to El Salvador,” 4.

<sup>242</sup> Call, “War Transitions,” 11.

<sup>243</sup> DeVere D. Woods Jr., David T. Skelton, and Carlos E. Ponce, “The Origins and Development of the Policia Nacional Civil of El Salvador,” NCJRS, December 2004, 4.  
<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/Mesko/207986.pdf>.

like these left El Salvador’s new security institutions aimless: “The government had not yet developed plans outlining the structure, operations, or resource needs of the police force.”<sup>244</sup>

The context of the immediate post-Chapultepec period also hindered the effective reformation of security institutions. The explosion of gang violence began while the consolidation of El Salvador’s new civilian police force was still underway. As a WOLA report observes, “the violent context favored an emphasis on a greater police presence and deployment across the territory, leaving aside other important aspects such as a rigorous selection process capable of filtering out applicants unfit for service.”<sup>245</sup> WOLA also notes that the chaotic security context of the post-Chapultepec period impeded “police training, the development of institutional planning capacity, and the creation of a disciplinary system.”<sup>246</sup> Moreover, Roberto Atha points out that police training in the aftermath of the peace accords suffered from considerable deficiencies in the areas of investigative methodology, access to basic police equipment, and adequate training sites.<sup>247</sup>

Another complication emerged from the fact that reforms failed to fundamentally transform the incentives and practices of institutional actors, with an enduring bias toward favoring the military as an institution over the newly created civilian national police. Massive and unconditional U.S. support during the civil war, combined with habits of state terrorism, had left a military institution with high prerogatives and little accountability.<sup>248</sup> As late as 1989 the *New York Times* observed that military officers and those associated with the armed forces benefited from “exorbitant sums bestowed upon them in recent years in substantial measure to line their own pockets and enhance their

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<sup>244</sup> “Aid to El Salvador,” 4.

<sup>245</sup> Beltrán, “Protect and Serve?,” 4.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Atha, “Transitions to Peace Effects,” 32–34.

<sup>248</sup> Zoltan Barany, “Building National Armies after Civil War: Lessons from Bosnia, El Salvador, and Lebanon,” *Political Science Quarterly* 129, no. 2 (2014). DOI: 10.1002/polq.12181.

own power.”<sup>249</sup> The newspaper eloquently summarized how such massive U.S. assistance created an unaccountable military elite:

‘One billion dollars in American military aid seems to have bought an army big enough to survive its own mistakes, and powerful enough to resist any effort to reform it—to end pervasive corruption or to weed out corrupt officers. Instead of fostering reform, the American money has been absorbed into a network of corruption and patronage that has grown up over a century, and has made the Salvadoran military an empire unto itself.’<sup>250</sup>

In a move emblematic of the military’s prerogatives, in 1993 the government granted blanket impunity to former security regime actors, notwithstanding the UN-sponsored Truth Commission’s findings that the military regime and its agents committed over 85 percent of the serious acts of violence.<sup>251</sup> Furthermore, as Cruz contends, maneuvering by the entrenched elites caused serious setbacks in the critical years of the reform following the peace accords, resulting in a diminished “capacity of the police to build an effective and professional organization to confront the problem of organized crime.”<sup>252</sup>

El Salvador’s counterproductive and militaristic policy responses—*Mano Dura* and *Super Mano Dura*—reflect the both the lasting military prerogatives and the inability of the police to formulate effective plans, implement adequate structures, and garner sufficient resources. The police never acquired the requisite level of institutional proficiency needed to confront new security challenges of gangs and organized crime. Consequently, despite constitutionally only being authorized for emergencies, El Salvador’s military has continued to act as a primary agent in the struggle against the gangs and organized crime.

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<sup>249</sup> Americas Watch, *El Salvador’s Decade of Terror*, 21.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>251</sup> Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>252</sup> José Miguel Cruz, “Violence, Citizen Insecurity, and Elite Maneuvering,” in *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 157.

## 2. Pragmatic Continuity: Nicaragua's Institutional Evolution

In contrast to El Salvador, Nicaragua did not undergo a process of purification and profound institutional reformation following the Contra War. Nicaragua's security forces instead underwent a pragmatic restructuring that loosened FSLN control while largely maintaining the institutional knowledge, experience, and practices developed during the previous decade. Targeted purges, informal negotiations, and legislation constituted the means of institutional reform, in contrast to the experience of El Salvador. This section examines several of the significant features of Nicaragua's institutional evolution and how these worked to enable the effectiveness reflected above in the indicators of plans, structures, and resources.

While El Salvador's internal security forces were engaging in state terrorism in the 1980s to combat the FMLN, Nicaragua's FSLN government had created a civilian Sandinista Police by late 1979 consisting of 12,000 members.<sup>253</sup> Notwithstanding the ongoing conflict with the Contras during the 1980s, the Sandinista police, as WOLA points out, "were able to accumulate an important body of technical and organizational experience" that enabled the institution "to construct a policing model focused on prevention, education, and service to the community in an effort to ensure a high level of efficiency despite the country's poverty."<sup>254</sup> Unlike in El Salvador during the 1980s, the police in Nicaragua during the 1980s developed a reputation for improving respect for human rights over that of the notorious Somoza National Guard.<sup>255</sup>

Contrary to El Salvador's profound break with the security structures during its civil war period, the structures that had developed over the course of the 1980s in Nicaragua remained largely intact. The landmark 1990 presidential elections saw the FSLN removed from power with the victory of President Chamorro and her National Opposition Union (UNO) party. In negotiations between UNO and Sandinista elites, the parties agreed to three important changes to the security institutions: first, de-

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<sup>253</sup> Beltrán, "Protect and Serve?," 6.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

politicization of the security forces; second, a reduction in the size of the army; third, the relinquishment of the power to appoint the Ministers of Defense and Interior.<sup>256</sup> Accordingly, Nicaragua passed the Police Law passed in 1992, which transformed the police from its role as a pro-FSLN guardian of the revolution to, as Nicaraguan sociologist Rocha states, “an armed entity of civic, apolitical, non-party” character.<sup>257</sup> Despite its de-politicization, the PNC retained its role as chief law enforcement agency domestically and persevered under Sandinista leadership. As Atha points out, the Sandinistas maintained a strong presence in many internal security institutions, such that “the structures, institutions, and constitutional order erected while the Sandinistas had been in power would be left in place.”<sup>258</sup> One noteworthy illustration of this principle came when Aminta Granera, a Sandinista who had risen through the PNC ranks from 1979 to become sub-commissioner prior to 1990, was promoted to the rank of commissioner in the Chamorro administration.<sup>259</sup> Her continuity of service embodied the fundamental institutional stability of the Nicaraguan police force.

Nicaraguan government institutions have worked to foster consensus-seeking forums for policy coordination and development. The National Police instituted a *Plan de la prevención de las pandillas* (Plan for the prevention of gangs) in 1999 that is characterized, as Rocha argues, by “neither the strong arm nor the benevolent hand.”<sup>260</sup> The bifurcated nature of plan reflects the informal negotiations within the national police between the FSLN and traditional factions, alluded to above. Moreover, Rocha participated on one initiative during the administration of President Enrique Bolaños (2002-2007). Named the Advisory Council of the Youth Secretariat, the working group consisted of regular sessions “where different interest groups—the Secretariat, the Bolaños government, international donors, NGOs, academics, the FSLN, the PLC, the National Police, and the Ombudsman’s Office—attempted to influence the country’s

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<sup>256</sup> Atha, “Transitions to Peace Effects,” 23.

<sup>257</sup> Rocha Gómez, “Mapping the Labyrinth from Within,” 543.

<sup>258</sup> Atha, “Transitions to Peace Effects,” 22.

<sup>259</sup> Johnson, Kareff, and Asvpromtada, “Nicaragua: Lessons,” 1.

<sup>260</sup> Rocha, “Street Gangs of Nicaragua,” 118.

youth policy.”<sup>261</sup> Rocha describes how the collaborative body engaged in vital discussions that attempted to draw a consensus from various sectors of Nicaraguan government and civil society pertaining to the emergent problem of gangs. This initiative did not represent an isolated event, but rather occurred within a context where anti-gang policies had been under development for years.<sup>262</sup>

Whereas El Salvador’s security institutions have floundered following its democratic transition, Nicaragua’s transition created an environment where more effective security institutions have developed. The relinquishment of FSLN control of the police and interior ministry did not involve destabilizing reforms, but rather surgical purges of senior leadership as well as transformation of its organizational character. The decentralized structure of the internal security institutions endured, and leaders encouraged collaborative development of security plans, structures, and resources. The result has been a set of security institutions that are far more effective than those in El Salvador, as the previous section demonstrated.

### **C. CONCLUSION: ASSESSING THE INSTITUTIONALIST HYPOTHESIS**

This chapter evaluated the institutionalist hypothesis pertaining to Nicaragua and El Salvador’s security institutions from both analytical and historical perspectives. Using the criterion of effectiveness developed by Bruneau and Matei—along with Matei’s three indicators of plans, structures, and resources—the comparative analysis of El Salvador and Nicaragua’s security institutions corroborated the institutionalist hypothesis’s predicted outcome, as less violent Nicaragua emerged with higher ratings in each indicator of effectiveness. The second part of the chapter consisted of a comparative historical analysis. I found that divergence in institutional effectiveness arose from the different development paths taken during each country’s democratic transition at the beginning of the 1990s. Whereas El Salvador’s security forces underwent a disruptive

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<sup>261</sup> Rocha Gómez, “Mapping the Labyrinth from Within,” 537.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 542.

period of purification brought about by the 1992 Chapultepec Peace Accords that militated against effectiveness, Nicaragua's institutional continuity fostered the formation of effective security institutions.

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## **V. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

What accounts for high violence rates in certain Central American republics, and why are some states more violent than others in the region? These questions have currency in the halls of the White House, Congress, and the State Department, as high levels of violence in Central America pose a challenge with security implications for the United States. Policymakers in Washington, DC are increasingly examining the root causes of Central American violence. Part of the reason for the uncertainty regarding policy responses to Central American violence has been a lack of analytical clarity on the underlying causes of violence, which would enable better allocation of capital for the most efficient return on investment. As a means of contributing to a solution, this thesis examined three of the most common hypotheses—the structural economic hypothesis, the rational choice criminology hypothesis, and the institutionalist hypothesis—with the aim of assessing the strength and validity of each using objective criteria to test each hypothesis's correlations with violence rates.

The findings confirmed that two of the three hypotheses had a strong correlation with observed violence rates: the rational choice criminology and institutionalist hypotheses. From a rational choice criminology perspective, Chapter III revealed strong correlations between sound state criminological approaches—specifically in the areas of intelligence gathering, community involvement, and recidivism reduction programs—and lower incidences of violence in the cases examined. Likewise, Chapter IV showed the data supported the institutionalist hypothesis. Effective security institutions—as judged by the Bruneau-Matei criteria of plans, structures, and resources—correlated with lower violence outcomes. On the contrary, as Chapter II indicated, structural economic problems of poverty and inequality only weakly correlated with violence outcomes due to the significant divergences from the predicted outcome in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador. Notwithstanding some general regional correlations, better economic conditions failed to correlate as strongly as the other variables did with violence rates.

This chapter first assesses current U.S. policy toward Central America in light of the findings and policy implications. It concludes by outlining several policy implications that emerge from the thesis's findings.

#### **A. EVALUATION OF CURRENT U.S. CENTRAL AMERICA POLICY**

The Merida Initiative, which became the Central American Regional Security Initiative (CARSI) in 2010, has involved the allocation of approximately \$1.2 billion to Central American republics since program inception with the aim of stabilizing the internal security environments of Central American republics.<sup>263</sup> A CARSI fact sheet lists five main program objectives:

1. CREATE safe streets for the citizens of the region
2. DISRUPT the movement of criminals and contraband to, within, and between the nations of Central America
3. SUPPORT the development of strong, capable, and accountable Central American governments
4. RE-ESTABLISH effective state presence, services and security in communities at risk
5. FOSTER cooperation between the nations of the region, international partners, and donors to combat regional security threats<sup>264</sup>

This section evaluates current U.S. Central American policy in light of the findings of this thesis. CARSI scores well in some areas, but it also has shortcomings that challenge to the program's efficacy. The section analyzes the positives first, followed by the areas of concern.

Some of CARSI's programs align with sound criminological approaches found to be valuable in this thesis. According to the CRS report, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have developed programs to train police to become

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<sup>263</sup> Peter J. Meyer and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative: Background and Policy Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service 7-5700 (R41731)*, December 17, 2015: 17. <https://www.hsl.org/?view&did=789224>.

<sup>264</sup> "Central American Regional Security Initiative: Fact Sheet," *Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs*, last modified August 5, 2016, <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/fs/2016/260869.htm>.

more community-oriented in their criminological approaches, a factor that Chapter III showed to correlate with lower incidences of violent crime.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, to support the development of sound intelligence gathering practices, Meyer and Seelke note that “CARSI has supported assessments of forensic laboratories, the establishment of wiretapping centers, and the creation of criminal investigative schools,” as well as introducing firearms tracking databases and biometric technology.<sup>266</sup> Finally, with respect to reducing recidivism, CARSI promotes “community-based and municipally led” councils where citizens can “analyze problems within the community and develop prevention plans to address those problems through activities ranging from vocational training to social entrepreneurship projects.”<sup>267</sup>

Where CARSI runs into problems concerns its limited ability to help countries build sustainable institutional effectiveness. Eric L. Olson and Katherine Moffat of the Wilson Center summarize some of CARSI’s main shortcomings in this area, with the four most pertinent as follows. First, as Olson and Moffat argue, “CARSI does not represent a security strategy but rather a number of programmatic initiatives with laudable goals that operate largely independent of each other.”<sup>268</sup> Developing sophisticated plans enables institutional effectiveness and, as indicated in Chapter IV, correlates with lower violence rates. Second, “Counter-narcotics operations often take precedence when broader institutional reform goals, such as professionalizing the police or justice sector, are unsuccessful or do not enjoy the strong backing of the host government.”<sup>269</sup> The lack of political will for lasting institutional reforms, as in El Salvador, results from governments seeking to immediate results to satisfy popular demand. Third, countries fail in the need for “implementing broader institutional reforms, undertaking anti-corruption measures, expanding violence prevention programs, and making significant financial contributions

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<sup>265</sup> Meyer and Seelke, “Central America Regional Security Initiative,” 20.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>268</sup> Eric L. Olson and Katherine Moffat, “Executive Summary,” in *Crime and Violence in Central America’s Northern Triangle: How U.S. Policy Responses Are Helping, Hurting, and Can Be Improved*, ed. Eric L. Olson (Washington, DC: Wilson Center, 2015), 4. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/crime-and-violence-central-americas-northern-triangle-how-us-policy-responses-are>.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 4.

of their own.”<sup>270</sup> Chapter IV examined the structural and resource factors that correlate with violence outcomes. Fourth, CARSI programs lack “adequate evaluations” by relying on “inputs—how many police were trained, or how much cocaine was seized—and not on the impact and outcome of the project.”<sup>271</sup> This final point strikes at the heart of the thesis’s purpose, which has sought to find, as a means of bringing analytical clarity, correlations between the outcomes of violence rates and the inputs of the three common explanations for violence: structural economic, institutional, and rational choice criminological hypotheses. What follows are several policy implications of this thesis that may apply to Central America and beyond.

## **B. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This section analyzes four of the most significant policy implications that emerge from the findings: the proper approach to post-conflict reconstruction in the context of transitional justice; the limits of economic development assistance as a violence-reduction program; the importance of developing of sound criminological approaches; and the necessity of building and preserving effective internal security institutions. Notably, these implications apply not only to Central American republics but also in many cases throughout the world. Variables like poverty, inequality, institutional effectiveness, and state criminological approaches are not unique to Central America. As such, this section includes reflections on how these policy implications apply to three other internationally significant cases: Iraq following the U.S. invasion in 2003, the present-day Colombian peace process, and the prospect of a future post-war Syria.

### **1. The Proper Approach to Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Context of Transitional Justice**

Certain key moments of institutional reform or crisis—like those following a civil war or period of unrest—offer states the ability to reshape internal security structures. One implication this thesis brings to light is the critical necessity of balancing purification with the establishment of effective internal security institutions during

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<sup>270</sup> Olson and Moffat, “Executive Summary,” 4.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 5.

periods of institutional transition. The priority given to purification often emerges as a visceral, if understandable, reaction to the horrors of state terrorism and human rights violations. Nevertheless, a more measured and long-term perspective is required to ensure the creation of effective security institutions, even if that means prudently granting clemency to some who may have critical capabilities and experience. Chapter IV examined El Salvador's conduct of state terrorism during the civil war period, where the legacy of state terrorism left its imprint on security institutions, as evidenced, for example, in El Salvador's ongoing preference for using the military to carry out internal security policies. Having analyzed El Salvador's transition through the framework of transitional justice literature, this thesis found that several reforms weakened internal security institutions by overemphasizing purification at the expense of effectiveness.

These findings have applicability beyond Central America. In analyzing the aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, some have reached similar conclusions. Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi of the International Center for Transitional Justice criticize the stringent de-Baathification program enacted from 2003 onward by the Coalition Provisional Authority. Among key lessons learned, according to Sissons and Al-Saiedi, is the need during a transition to “design a vetting program, not a purge” to ensure vital individuals from the previous regime remain as well as to ensure against blind overreaction.<sup>272</sup> The authors also refer to the need to “look to the future” in the establishment of key institutions—instead of indiscriminately dismissing all of the Iraqi army, for instance—such that new institutions are both purified and effective.<sup>273</sup> In retrospect many agree that the Iraqi insurgency gained a considerable jolt from the disenfranchisement of the previous regime's security institutions, fostering an adverse environment for the formation of effective new institutions. Cases like these reveal the potential deleterious consequences of neglecting, in the name of purification, the formation of effective security institutions, however valuable purification may seem at the time.

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<sup>272</sup> Miranda Sissons and Abdulrazzaq Al-Saiedi, “A Bitter Legacy: Lessons of De-Baathification in Iraq,” *International Center for Transitional Justice* (March 2013), 1.  
<https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Report-Iraq-De-Baathification-2013-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

The lessons learned from cases like El Salvador and Iraq have direct relevance to cases that are coming into international focus today. Colombia is on the cusp of a formal peace agreement to end the decades long Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) insurgency. If reforms follow the Chapultepec model of purification at the expense of institutional effectiveness and continuity of competence, the thesis's findings predict the outcome to be disastrous. That path, however, appears to be unlikely, as purifying government security institutions has not been a condition demanded by either side. Instead, the peace agreement, which the government and FARC agreed to in September 2016 but voters narrowly rejected in October, involves what the *New York Times* referred to as a “transitional justice system” that would guarantee political representation to the FARC, increased investment in FARC-dominated rural areas, and amnesty or reduced sentences for those who committed “all but the most grievous crimes.”<sup>274</sup> The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports that a “special legal framework” would “FARC fighters, government soldiers and members of right-wing paramilitary groups” who confess their crimes to “not serve prison sentences but will take part in ‘acts of reparation,’ including clearing land mines, repairing damaged infrastructure and helping victims.”<sup>275</sup> The public’s rejection of the initial peace agreement, in deference to former President Uribe who argued it was too lenient, may well cause the FARC to demand more rigid purification of security institutions in response to Uribe’s demands. The findings of this thesis suggest that negotiators must pursue a precarious balance of purification, reconciliation, and preserving effectiveness and continuity.

In a similar vein, the case of Syria will undoubtedly involve a post-war transitional scenario in which the state must rebuild its internal security institutions. The post-war Syrian state will likely be faced with the question of transitional justice and how to reform Bashar al-Assad’s oppressive security institutions. Popular demand for

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<sup>274</sup> Nicholas Casey, “Colombia and FARC Reach Deal to End the Americas’ Longest War,” *The New York Times*, last modified 24 August 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/25/world/americas/colombia-farc-peace-deal.html>.

<sup>275</sup> “Colombia Peace Deal: What are the Most Contentious Points?,” *BBC News*, September 28, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37457860>.

purification is likely to be high, and the temptation for radical purification will likely be strong, due to the human rights violations of the Russian-backed state security forces. Nevertheless, this thesis's findings suggest that the post-war negotiations must give serious consideration to vetting and possibly retaining valuable actors from the Assad regime to ensure effectiveness of security institutions. Absent this continuity, foreign assistance and state resources must promptly be dedicated to training and equipping internal security institutions, a distant second best solution.

## **2. The Limits of Using Economic Development Assistance as a Violence-Reduction Program**

In contrast to much of the literature, the thesis's findings suggest that reducing poverty and inequality may not be the most efficient means of ameliorating a violent internal security situation. Instead, the findings suggest that other non-economic variables correlate more closely with internal security outcomes. Specifically, as Chapters III and IV found, institutional effectiveness and sound criminological approaches correlate more closely with lower violence rates, a finding exemplified by the case of Nicaragua. Nicaragua is one of the most economically disadvantaged countries in Central America. Almost every indicator of poverty and inequality examined in Chapter II, with the exception of the Gini index, reveals Nicaragua to have more challenges than the average Central American republic. Nevertheless, Nicaragua exceeds even much wealthier Costa Rica and Panama in citizen security as measured by homicide rates. The findings represent indicate that, while economic assistance can be valuable for humanitarian and other legitimate purposes, other avenues of investment may result in more efficient solutions to the problem of violence.

In post-war Iraq in 2003, much planning was given to humanitarian assistance and economic reconstruction, but critical mistakes—like disbanding the Iraqi army and the radical de-Baathification program—reflected a poor understanding of the significance of ensuring institutional effectiveness.<sup>276</sup> In Colombia, the proposed peace agreement

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<sup>276</sup> Kate Phillips, Shane Lauth, and Erin Schenck, “U.S. Military Operations in Iraq: Planning, Combat, and Occupation,” *Strategic Studies Institute*, April 2006: 11. <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/pub653.pdf>.

rightly includes some focus on economic issues like increased investments in poorer rural areas and the payment of a basic minimum wage for guerilla fighters who surrender.<sup>277</sup> Nevertheless, issues more critical to long-term internal security in Colombia revolve around the method of purifying security structures and the preservation of institutional effectiveness—conclusions that, as discussed previously, negotiators seem to understand. Similarly, once the Syrian conflict comes to an end, humanitarian assistance and economic development measures will undoubtedly be required, but planners and negotiators will best be able to inculcate a positive security environment through the preservation of institutional effectiveness and sound criminological approaches.

### **3. Developing Sound Criminological Approaches**

Chapter III examined the strength of state criminological approaches in Nicaragua and El Salvador from a comparative perspective. The chapter used the criteria of intelligence gathering, community involvement, and recidivism reduction programs. This section draws out significant observations and policy implications pertaining to each of these criteria.

#### ***a. Building Intelligence Capacity through Fusion Centers***

Good intelligence facilitates law enforcement control over territory. As argued in Chapter III, sound information-gathering capabilities are a *sine qua non* of citizen security. One of the distinguishing features that enables Nicaraguan internal security institutions to execute their missions effectively centers on sophisticated intelligence gathering capabilities, as Chapter III indicated. For states like El Salvador, better intelligence would help law enforcement consolidate control over territory contested by organized crime. Mauricio García Mejía of the Inter-American Development Bank succinctly states the importance of information in relation to good policing:

Information gathered from various channels is systematically organized, analyzed and used strategically to reduce or eliminate the factors that fuel

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<sup>277</sup> BBC News, “Colombia Peace Deal.”

crime. The dynamics of crime do change, so efficient channels are needed to capture and process information and stay ahead of the changes.<sup>278</sup>

Given the centrality of good intelligence-gathering mechanisms, Bruneau has promoted the idea introducing intelligence fusion centers as a first step toward building internal security capacity in violent Central American republics like El Salvador.<sup>279</sup> In the US, intelligence fusion centers have arisen throughout the country, mostly since the September 11, 2001 attacks, to coordinate threat analyses with local law enforcement and convert collected data into actionable intelligence.<sup>280</sup> Bruneau notes that intelligence fusion centers have quietly multiplied throughout the country due to their usefulness not only in federal counter-terrorism missions, but also under state and local anti-crime initiatives.<sup>281</sup> In essence, intelligence fusion centers serve as a key component of enabling federal, state, and local security institutions to maintain control over territory. To Bruneau, intelligence fusion centers in Central America could similarly help states with weak security institutions and approaches “begin to insert a state presence, which will fill vacuums, or so-called ungoverned spaces, and bring together different elements of the security sector, including intelligence agencies, to focus on the gang problem.”<sup>282</sup>

Intelligence fusion centers can also help satisfy the demands of popular will that often favors short-term results over needed mid- to long-term institutional reforms. Standard internal security proposals—like institutional reform, increased funding for police, and better education—are, though necessary, mid- to long-range objectives that require patience, which unfortunately is an elusive virtue to countries with skyrocketing violence rates like El Salvador. The failure of successive reform packages in El Salvador has resulted, in part, from the lack of political will for anything other than short-term solutions. Faced with staggering violence, the public favors *Mano Dura* strategies, which

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<sup>278</sup> Mauricio García Mejía, “How effective is community-based policing? The case of Nicaragua,” *Inter-American Development Bank* (blog), 26 June 2015, <http://blogs.iadb.org/caribbean-dev-trends/2015/06/26/effective-community-based-policing-case-nicaragua/>.

<sup>279</sup> Bruneau, “Street Gangs in Central America.”

<sup>280</sup> John Rollins, “Fusion Centers: Issues and Options for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service*, January 18, 2008, 5–6. <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/intel/RL34070.pdf>.

<sup>281</sup> Bruneau, “Street Gangs in Central America.”

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

many consider to be deleterious to proper institutional development and contrary to best criminological practices. Intelligence fusion centers, on the contrary, could help security forces to deliver more immediate results while also inculcating sound criminological approaches and more effective institutions.

**b. Community Involvement and Recidivism Reduction Programs**

As indicated in Chapter III, community involvement fosters legitimacy, which in turn enables internal security institutions to fulfill their missions and reduces reliance on extra-constitutional measures, like those consistently undertaken by El Salvador's military under *Mano Dura* policies. The findings in Chapter III contrasted Nicaragua's high level of community involvement with its internal security institutions with El Salvador's low level of community involvement. Some of Nicaragua's most noteworthy features include extensive networks of community-based neighborhood watch groups that interface with the national police, the public's involvement in the vetting of PNC recruits, and the enlistment of tens of thousands of volunteers in crime-deterrence programs. Other countries can and should adapt some of Nicaragua's best practices to suit local circumstances. Notably, such initiatives rely heavily on indigenous human capital and not necessarily on financial capital. As community involvement relies primarily on the indigenous political and popular will, the findings again point to the limits of foreign monetary assistance.

The example of Nicaragua in Chapter III also revealed that investment in recidivism reduction programs correlates with lower violence outcomes. In countries where gangs are flourishing, such policies to provide alternate paths and identities for at-risk youths become even more important. Tough mandatory penalties for gang membership, as in El Salvador's *Mano Dura* programs, have exacerbated the problem by ostracizing at-risk youths and preventing their reconciling with society. Similarly, in post-invasion Iraq, Paul Bremer's decision to conduct a rigid de-baathification program served to ostracize 35,000 civil servants from gainful employment and participation in

society, contributing to the formation of an incipient aggrieved insurgency.<sup>283</sup> A positive example is emerging in Colombia, where the proposed peace agreement would provide a means for all parties to be integrated into society in a constructive manner, as explained previously. Syria will likely be faced with a situation that demands judicious approach to punishing former security officials with the aim of removing motivation for the disenfranchised to undermine the system.

#### **4. Building and Preserving Institutional Effectiveness**

The policy implications of this section emerge from Chapter IV, which consisted of a comparative analysis of the effectiveness of security institutions in Nicaragua and El Salvador. This section develops policy implications based on each of the three criteria used in Chapter IV: plans, structures, and resources.

##### *a. Developing Internal Security Plans*

As Chapter IV showed, Nicaragua's internal security plans have grown out of a deliberative process that has incorporated consensus-seeking among internal security experts and a balance between justice and mercy in the suppression of criminality. El Salvador's development of internal security plans, on the contrary, was inhibited by the institutional disruption that occurred following the Chapultepec Peace Accords' excessive purification. As violence escalated, the democratically elected leaders have been beholden to popular demands for quick fixes to insecurity problems, instead of developing and implementing sound internal security plans with longer-term effectiveness horizons. The conundrum in which El Salvador finds itself has its roots in the notion of transitional justice and the question of how to implement a post-conflict reconstruction process that, in the aftermath of civil conflict, can satisfy demands for purification but also ensure institutional effectiveness. Without that continuity of effective individuals experienced in developing criminological plans, countries like El Salvador have descended into civil chaos, as the state has trouble maintaining its monopoly of violence in the service of the law. Countries emerging from periods of civil

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<sup>283</sup> George Packer, *The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 191.

conflict—like Iraq, Colombia, and Syria—can and should learn from the cautionary example of El Salvador.

***b. Ensuring Viable Security Structures***

As indicated in Chapter IV, structural considerations relevant to effectiveness include the institutional networks, processes, and procedures that enable internal security forces to effectively fulfill their missions. El Salvador’s radical purification of security institutions in the Chapultepec Peace Accords, although well intentioned and popular, deconstructed decades worth of structural development. Although reform was unquestionably required in the aftermath of El Salvador’s use of state terrorism during the civil war, such a radical structural reform left formidable obstacles in the way of El Salvador’s new security institutions. Conversely, the security structures established by Nicaragua in the aftermath of its 1979 revolution—including a newly reformed national police and networks of community-based groups—did not experience drastic purifications in the democratic transition following the ousting of the FSLN. Instead, structural developments occurred through informal negotiations and consensus seeking by elites. The result has been a gradual process of reform of security structures—including leadership changes, redefinition of missions, and de-politicization of organizational identities—to adapt to the democratic era.

The case of post-invasion Iraq clearly falls into the category of a negative case study for ensuring structural viability. As noted previously, Bremer’s order to disband of Iraq’s army in 2003 plunged the country into structural disarray. As George Packer notes, the decision “came to be seen as one of the disasters of the war” as it put “several hundred thousand armed Iraqis on the street with no job and no salary.”<sup>284</sup> In Colombia, on the other hand, peace negotiators seem to understand the importance of ensuring viable security structures; reforms, as indicated above, do not dismantle current structures and instead open the door to reconciliation and inclusion. A post-war Syria will likely closely be faced with a similar decision as that in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, namely: How should old security structures be treated?

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<sup>284</sup> Packer, *Assassins’ Gate*, 193.

*c. Sustaining Resources for Internal Security*

The question of resources is often the one that domestic policymakers think of as the easiest to fix with foreign assistance programs. Nevertheless, a country's reliance on U.S. assistance can also inhibit the public's buy-in to the state security structure, since most have little vested financial interest in security institutions funded by foreigners. As Gordon Adams and Rebecca Williams note, the U.S. often uses a "security framework" where "governance and development is, at best, a secondary goal to immediate security requirements."<sup>285</sup> In an apparent response to such concerns, as of 2016, Congress is striving to make allocation of CARSI funds dependent on certain structural and institutional reforms, among which is more local taxation to pay for institutional development. The proposed Consolidated Appropriations Act for 2016 (H.R. 2029) for fiscal year 2016 would require the Secretary of State to certify that Central American countries are making progress "to improve border security, combat corruption, increase revenues, and address human rights concerns, among other actions."<sup>286</sup> The requirement to raise revenues from the local population would have two positive effects. First, the policy should help encourage states to capture sufficient resources to support their institutions. Second, requiring that Central American governments raise revenues from their own populations will, over time, create more of a vested interest by the public. Such a vested interest should, in turn, create more popular demand for institutional reforms and effectiveness. As a result, initiatives like this could also reduce the counterproductive popular demand for more immediate, but ultimately deleterious, solutions.

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<sup>285</sup> Gordon Adams and Rebecca Williams, "A New Way Forward: Rebalancing Security Assistance Programs and Authorities," *The Henry L. Stimson Center* (Washington, DC: 2011), 27–28. [http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/A\\_New\\_Way\\_Foward\\_Final.pdf](http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/A_New_Way_Foward_Final.pdf).

<sup>286</sup> Meyer and Seelke, "Central America Regional Security Initiative," 24.

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